

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**SOCIAL IDENTITY IN ADJUSTING TO UNIVERSITY LIFE:
EXPERIENCES OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL.**

By

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Declaration

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Abstract

The number of students from disadvantaged communities within South African tertiary institutions continues to grow. There is a dynamic culture within these institutions to which students have to adjust. This culture is not only characterized by diversity in academic faculties but by diversity in socio-economic backgrounds, racial groups and modern social trends. The ability to adjust and be integrated academically and socially within the university and its diverse social culture is a unique experience to every student. The aim of this study was to explore the student's experiences, their shifting social roles, the social pressures experienced at university and the impact of the university as a social setting on social identity. Guided by an interpretive paradigm, the study followed qualitative methods to collect and to analyse data.

A total number of 19, South African undergraduate Zulu speaking students (10 Males and 9 Females) within the school of Applied Human Sciences were purposefully selected to participate in 3 focus group discussions. Using thematic analysis, the results were grouped under five themes. These include; orientation, culture shock, self- perceptions, labelling as a social barrier and finally, social support. The struggle to fit in due to social barriers such as language, social class, and economic status was perceived by the participants as one of the major challenges at university. Even if their university experiences were different, the participants' social identities proved to be fluid and susceptible to change. Through their unique university experiences, participants learned to redefine their identities, social roles within and outside of university. Participants continuously and actively establish a sense of belonging on campus by creating a space on campus that caters for their social needs and process of adjustment. A positively perceived process of adjustment to campus social life appears to have positive impact on the quality of the participants' overall experience at university and their sense of self.

Key words:

Social Identity, Economically-disadvantaged, Alienation & adjustment

Definition of concepts

The following is a brief definition of main concepts of the study.

Adjustment

Adjustment is defined as a process that individuals go through when in a new environment whereby they attempt to establish a balance between held values, expectations and the regulations of the new environment (Backhaus, 2009; Salami, 2011). There are three kinds of adjustment processes amongst the student population and these are:

1. Academic adjustment is measured by how well a student copes with academic demands and the level of motivation to complete academic tasks (Salami, 2011).
2. Social adjustment is the process of individuation from family, measured by the student's involvement with social activities and satisfaction with aspects of the university environment (Salami, 2011).
3. Emotional adjustment is the ability and the coping skills used to emotionally handle challenges (Salami, 2011).

Alienation

Alienation is an emotional and mental state experienced by an individual that struggles to identify with the existing group due to social rejection or difference. Alienation has negative impact on the individual's sense of self and competency within that group (Rudo & Gaidzanwa, 2007).

Economically disadvantaged

The economically disadvantaged is a term used as to rank the economic status of an individual or a group of people; it refers to the lower economic status of citizens in comparison to that of the general population, the comparison is based on the average per-capita income. The economically disadvantaged communities, most of which are in rural areas are marked by high levels of poverty and with people still living below the upper-bound poverty line (Natrass & Seekings, 2001).

Social Identity

Social identity is part of the individual's self-concept that is derived from knowledge of being a member of a social group (Brown, 2000; Howard, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals attach value and emotional significance to the membership and that determines the strength of and commitment to the perceived social identity (Howard, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The status that comes with one's social identity may or may not enhance one's self-esteem within the social group (Howard, 2000).

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. Background

Individuals generally adjust better in new settings when they experience a sense of belonging and have adequate knowledge of how to handle social situations that occur within those environmental settings (Bangen & Kapp, 2005). Social settings act as space for innumerable interactions between individuals and between social groups, suggesting that the ability to identify oneself within a social group gives an individual a frame of reference in which to interpret their actions and social situations (Brown, 2000; Burke & Reitzes, 1981, Howard, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This process allows for adjustment and construction of identities.

The social settings within which identities are constructed are in constant change, in the process, people evaluate their social identities in order to allow for an adjustment that is in accordance with the perceived experiences in those social settings (Campbell, 1997; Howard, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is reasonable to note that social contexts cannot be ignored when looking at social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In fact, identities are multidimensional, fluid and contextual. An individual may take up more than one role but the strength of each social identity is determined by the value and emotional significance attached to each identity (Fay, 1996).

The end of apartheid rule in South Africa in 1994 did not terminate the socio-economic gap between urban minorities and the rural majority (Natrass & Seekings, 2001). Ideally, it presented an opportunity for previously disadvantaged South Africans to amongst other things, gain access to tertiary education (Kagee, Naidoo & Mahatey, 1997). To someone who previously had little access to university, such an opportunity meant new possibilities, exposure to people of a different economic class, races, nationalities, languages and other social differences (Kagee, Naidoo & Mahatey, 1997). This research will therefore explore the process of adjusting to university life with focus on the social identity of economically disadvantaged students.

In a speech made at the African education awards in 1997, ex-president Nelson Mandela emphasised that, reconstruction and development efforts of the entire continent and successful interaction in the global village depends largely on the progress made to educate the population. Education is one of many basic human rights in South African societies today. For those that previously lacked equal access to the

opportunity, education is a privilege; tertiary education is a bigger privilege (Asmal & James-Daedralus, 2001).

The social implications remaining after the apartheid rule was dismantled in South Africa include socio-economic differences between individuals resident in either urban and rural areas (Aliber, 2003; Klasen, 2002; Natrass & Seekings, 2001). These differences are characterized by a huge number of rural communities burdened with poverty (Aliber, 2003; Klasen, 2002; Natrass & Seekings, 2001).

South African communities are faced with socio-economic inequalities and tertiary institutions are generally far from the rural areas. An opportunity to get higher education means that one has to move away from home and start a new life in a new environment. Bojuwone (2002) argues that because people generally feel insecure in new places, new university students tend to experience confusion, helplessness and anxiety when enrolled to an institution. More than the challenge of having to move away from home, the first few weeks away from home may bring loneliness as new students attempt to establish new relationships or negotiate their space within the new environment (Friedlander, Reid, Supak & Cribbie, 2007).

In trying to understand the experiences of new university students, one has to first understand the perceptions they hold about who they are and how they make sense of their experiences. Tajfel and Turner (1979) accordingly argue that, the way in which an individual perceives themselves is derived from knowledge of their membership to a social group, including the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.

1.2. Rationale

A past study shows that the outcomes of the history of Apartheid on South African communities includes an adoption of western ideologies and trends by the youth of South Africa (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). The social shift from a collective society to an individualistic society promoted by some western ideologies allows the youth to cope with the new socio-historical pressures, alienating them from their social realities (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997).

Due to the broad social diversity in university campuses, social identities are exposed to broader social trends, the latter may have positive and sometimes negative consequences on the individual. Support structures are available in most universities, i.e. student counselling centres, mentors, Student Representative Councils and more. For some students, socio economic background and their perceived roles within this new big institution presents a new challenge, finding and maintaining a positive sense of self brings with it a new challenge. The emotional distress that comes with becoming a new student is generally overwhelming. Dealing with the academic pressure of being a student becomes a bigger burden if a student has to deal with an inability to fit in to the social environment at university.

The challenges and observations made while adjusting to university were used by the researcher as a reference point in attempt to find an in-depth understanding of the experiences of other students. This research is an attempt to share an aspect of university as experienced by students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The intention is to later inform and assist in the accumulation of knowledge and preparation strategies that will help students from disadvantaged backgrounds to have a better experience of university life. An understanding of these social experiences will pave way to a more focused and helpful method of intervention. Understanding the students' needs from their point of view makes it easier for the university to anticipate the needs of students from all backgrounds. This understanding might even shed light for other students and eventually facilitate more open discussions towards building and maintaining diverse relationships amongst the student population.

1.3. Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of undergraduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus. The focus is to understand how they adjust to the university life, looking at their social identity and how that impacts on their experiences of being new university students.

1.4. Research objectives

- 1.4.1. To examine the experiences of economically disadvantaged students in adjusting to university life.
- 1.4.2. To explore the shifting social roles and social pressures that under-graduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds experience at university.
- 1.4.3. To determine the impact of the university as a social setting on social identity of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

1.5 Research questions

- 1.5.1. What are some of the social experiences of economically disadvantaged students in adjusting to university life?
- 1.5.2. What are the shifts in the social roles and social pressures experienced by under-graduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds at university?
- 1.5.3. What impact does university as a social setting have on student's identity as they adjust to university?

1.6. Outline of the study

Chapter 1 provides the introduction, background, rationale, aim, research objectives, and research questions. Chapter 2 discusses the literature review which focuses on the background of the economically disadvantaged South Africans and the dynamics of adjustment and social identity at university. It also gives an outline of the theoretical framework, a stance from which the research problem to be understood. Chapter 3 presents the research methods used in this study. These include, research design, recruitment strategies which constitutes a description of research instruments, data analysis, reliability and validity, data collection procedure and ethical clearance. Chapter 4 discusses the findings and links findings with literature discussed in Chapter 2 and finally chapter 5 focusses on the conclusions, recommendations and limitations.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter was an introduction to the study. It presented a background to the study topic. In addition, this chapter presented the rationale, aims and objectives of the study and an outline of the chapters.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will explore a number of concerns that constitute the experiences of economically disadvantaged students within South African tertiary institutions. It will unpack the circumstances of the apartheid era that led to economic disadvantages in post-apartheid. The chapter will further discuss tertiary institutions in South Africa, the economically disadvantaged at university, the state of current social trends in South Africa that potentially have an impact on the adjustment of new students at university. Finally, this chapter will discuss the theoretical framework and attempt to create a link between the literature background and the theory.

2.2. Background History: Apartheid era

By 1989, an estimated number of a million and more people resided in homesteads around South Africa (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei, KwaZulu, Lebowa and Qwaqwa) (Smith, 1992). The groups that resided in homesteads were made up of black people and numbered more than the people who lived both in urban areas and metropolises (Smith, 1992). During this period, the government did very little to ensure access to basic needs, did not prioritise facilitation of social development and positive social change in some of these home steads (Smith, 1992). Division of resources and access to basic human rights was governed by strong discriminatory policies existing then. A few of these policies include, the Population Registration act of 1950, Group Areas Act of 1950, Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951 and the 1953 Bantu Education Act (Smith, 1992).

The Population Registration Act of 1950 held that each individual living in South Africa be classified and registered in accordance with his or her racial characteristics as part of the system. This effectively led to a classification of the South African population into four racial groups: ‘Whites, Blacks, Coloureds, and Indians. In order to accomplish this procedure, physical appearance and social acceptability was used as a measure (Riley, 1991).

The Group Areas Act comprised acts that assigned racial groups to different residential and business sections in urban areas in a system of urban apartheid (Goldberg, 1993).

- a. Residential area for each racial group;
- b. Strong physical boundaries or imagined barriers to serve as buffers between racial residential zones. Barriers may be natural, e.g. a river, valley, or human constructions, e.g. a park, railway line, or highway;
- c. Each racial group should have direct access to work areas without having to enter the residential zone of another racial group.
- d. The central business district is to remain under white control (Goldberg, 1993)

The prevention of Illegal Squatting Act of 1951 authorised the forcible removal of squatting communities. Moreover, it allowed eviction and destruction of homes of squatters by landowners, local authorities and government officials (Henrard, 1996). The Bantu Education Act of 1953 was an act that authorised enforcing racially separated educational facilities including universities (Thomas, 1996). These policies perpetuated income poverty and inequality through separating citizenry according to race, restricted opportunities of employment, quality education and health care (Seekings, 2007). The end of the South African apartheid rule in 1994 brought about many positive changes including eradicating the use of these discriminatory policies. The change brought with it promises of equal opportunity for all citizens regardless of race however, it did not end the socio-economic gap between urban minorities and the majority rural settlers (Natrass & Seekings, 2001).

2.3. Post-Apartheid: Economic disadvantages

According to Seekings (2007), when the ANC was elected to power in 1994, the World Bank and University of Cape Town partnered on an income and expenditure study in South Africa. The research findings assisted in the process of drawing up policies and outlining implementation strategies geared to bring about equal opportunities of social development for people across all races. To this effect, the government inaugurated the constitution of South Africa which occur in the year 1996 (Seekings, 2007). The constitution enshrined all matters of life in the country, it outlined and guided the rules and regulations around the basic needs of all people. One of the aims of the constitution was to ensure that everyone had a fair and equal opportunity to basic needs, resources and social wellbeing. In section 20 of Constitution it is stated that, “Everyone has a right to freedom of movement, to enter anywhere in the Republic of South Africa” (p. 1249). It further states in section 29 that, “Everyone has a right to further education which the state must make available and accessible” (p. 1256). According to the constitution, everyone has an equal right to the same educational and social opportunities.

Inequality continues to burden the South African society. Natrass and Seekings (2001) argue that, when Apartheid ended in 1994, the average per-capita income among the black population was ten times lower, compared to that of the white population. The primary argument in this paper was that inequality in the post-apartheid South Africa is not principally interracial, but that the declining interracial inequality has not reduced overall inequality. The major finding was that the society became dependent on factors that drive inequality such as wages and salaries (Natrass & Seekings, 2001). Yet, distinguishing those that are poor and the rich depends largely on how poverty is measured. Aliber (2003) focused on the province of KwaZulu-Natal when identifying the features that distinguish the poor. To name a few of these:

“Access to services is highly skewed by income level, by location, and by race. 71.6% of all poor people reside in rural areas, and 70.9% of all rural people are poor. With reference to the same poverty line, 61% of South Africans are poor, 38% of coloureds, 5% of Indians, and 1% of whites. 86.9%, of all households in KwaZulu-Natal are from rural areas, 30% of rural African households are chronically poor” (p. 09).

This is further highlighted by Woolard and Klasen (2005) in their discussion of income mobility in South Africa’s KwaZulu-Natal between 1993 and 1998.

KwaZulu-Natal is South Africa’s most populated of the 9 provinces and it has high social stratification. Within this province there is the metropolitan area of Durban with poor surrounding towns and poor rural former homelands with high levels of poverty and unemployment (Woolard & Klasen, 2005). It is important to note that chronically poor households tend to spend less money on food per adult compared to households of other categories (Aliber, 2003). Hence, poverty is evidently prevalent in rural areas (Aliber, 2003; Nastras & Seeking, 2007; Woolard & Klasen, 2005).

The gap between the poor and the rich is susceptible to change depending on either failure or success of strategies in place to eradicate poverty. Statistics South Africa (2014) reports that between 2006 and 2009 there was a 20% decrease in the number of South African citizens living below the poverty line. In 2006, the majority of the population in seven of the nine South African provinces were still living below the upper-bound poverty line with the highest poverty levels found in Limpopo where 74,4% of all residents were poor, Eastern Cape (69,5%) and KwaZulu-Natal with 69,1% (Statistics South Africa, 2014). In 2011, results of a census conducted in South Africa showed that Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal had respectively had the biggest population provinces and that more than a quarter (26, 3%) of all poor people lived in KwaZulu- Natal.

In 2011 more than two-thirds (68, 8%) of rural dwellers were still living in poverty as compared to less than a third (30, 9%) of residents in urban areas and making a 2.2% difference from the 71.6% given Aliber in 2003 (Statistics South Africa, 2014). The above information indicates that there are slow developments occurring but not much difference in moving citizens to a standard of living that is above the poverty line. The communities mentioned above are of the familiar environment and homes to many young people who progress and become new students. Perceptions of who they are and the social roles they play are influenced by the homes and communities they come from. When one is a member of a rural and poor community, their life and perceptions of the self are in one way or another shaped by their experiences. The following sub-sections will unpack literature that focuses on aspects of being a student from an economically disadvantaged community.

2.4. Tertiary institutions in South Africa

In the apartheid era, getting an education was a privilege for some racial groups and this was due to the bias policies that dictated even the student representation in tertiary institutions (Asmal & James-Daedralus, 2001; Kagee, Naidoo, & Mahatey, 1997). The Bantu Education Act of 1953 compelled South African universities to grant admission on basis of academic performance but more importantly, on racial preference (Summer, 2013). Today, the University of Witwatersrand, University of Free State, Rhodes University and the University of Cape Town are known to be previously white universities; they were funded by government and the majority of enrolled students were white males (Summer, 2013).

The environment within South African universities has highly transformed since the dismantling of apartheid. The latter is characterized by a larger female presentation at university compared to males and a larger number of black African students than that of white students (Summer, 2013). Attempts to ensure equal access to tertiary education, though not entirely successful have led to an increase in the number of females enrolling in universities. There is also an increase of students from disadvantaged communities which has in turn increased the number of African students (Kagee, Naidoo, & Mahatey, 1997).

2.5. The economically disadvantaged at University.

Access to university for economically disadvantaged students has previously proved to widen their future possibilities, capacitating them to transform communities they come from (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005).

There is however, evidence of poor academic performance for historically disadvantaged students while a limited number of South African students in general progress to postgraduate education (Summer, 2013).

Several factors accounting for the poor academic performance and lack of progression to postgraduate studies among economically disadvantaged students exist. In order to outline theoretical underpinnings of a pilot-based students mentoring program, Kagee, Naidoo and Mahatey (1997) argue that, gross inequality and lack of resource provision at primary and secondary school level leave students from disadvantaged communities under-prepared for the demands of tertiary education compared to the minority students who come from developed previously white schools. Due to this, students from disadvantaged communities experience a noticeable level of anxiety and alienation from lectures, academic discourse and the university (Kagee, Naidoo, & Mahatey, 1997). In part, this suggests that the number of university students from disadvantaged communities will continue to grow over the years (Kagee, Naidoo, & Mahatey, 1997; Summer, 2013).

2.6. Adjustment

There is evidence highlighting the relationship between a disadvantaged background and poor social adjustment but very little evidence to show a causal relationship between the two factors (Summer, 2013). People generally feel insecure in new places, and Bojuwone (2002) argues that, new university students may experience confusion, helplessness, anxiety for becoming new members of an institution. Transition from high school to university can be a stressful and challenging due to separation from familiar environments and daily routine (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). The first move away from home for first time reduces students' personal contact and support from family and friends (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007).

The level of stress experienced by new university students depends on the meaning the individual attaches to experiences within the new settings (Bojuwone, 2002). The move from home brings about a huge shift in the social experiences, Bangeni and Kapp (2005) argue that students' identities and roles over their undergraduate years are influenced by social boundaries, the desire to achieve individual success and the desire to belong in a social group. The sooner the adjustment, the more likely they are able to commit to university (Backhaus, 2009). Adjustment is defined as a process whereby students interact with their new environment to establish a balance between their values, expectations, and the regulations within that environment (Backhaus, 2009; Friedlander, et al. 2007; Salami, 2011).

Adjustment in this regard is measured by academic, social and emotional aspects of university (Backhaus, 2009; Friedlander, et al. 2007). Academic adjustment is measured by how well a student copes with academic demands and the level of motivation to complete academic tasks (Friedlander, et al. 2007; Salami, 2011). Social adjustment is the process of individuation from family, measured by the student's involvement with social activities and satisfaction with aspects of the university environment (Friedlander, et al. 2007; Salami, 2011).

Emotional adjustment is the ability and the coping skills used to emotionally handle challenges (Friedlander, et al. 2007; Salami, 2011). Social and emotional adjustment refers to the psychological and physical methods to deal with distress and discomfort students may experience entering university for the first time (Backhaus, 2009; Friedlander, et al. 2007; Salami, 2011). Students generally experience loneliness in the first few weeks of university, hence a need to form relationships arises (Salami, 2011). This need is generally unfulfilled among some students from low income socio-economic backgrounds as they are less adjusted, economically, socially and emotionally (Backhaus, 2009; Kagee, Naidoo, & Mahatey, 1997).

The ability to adjust within university determines commitment to the institution and lessens the possibility of dropping out (Backhaus, 2009). Social support and self-esteem are important factors in the process of academic, social and emotional adjustment (Friedlander, et al. 2007; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000). Higher levels of perceived social support, self-esteem and lower levels of stress were all factors positively related to positive adjustment (Friedlander, et al. 2007). Students who thought they had a strong social support system, adjusted better (Friedlander, et al. 2007; Salami, 2011).

Lee and Robbins (1998) conducted a study to assess the relationship between social connectedness, anxiety, self-esteem, and social identity of a group of women. In this study, anxiety was found to relate negatively with social connectedness. In the same study, social connectedness proved to have a positive effect on the women's self-esteem, and their social identity. The process of adjustment is not always the same for all people and different factors play a role in each person's experience. One of the factors that may lead to poor adjustment for new students is culture shock. This involves significant social and psychological relearning, e.g. having to adjust from rural to urban life (Pescarella & Terenzini (1991). There are other significant factors that may interfere with the process of adjusting for students. Previous research by Leon and Lea (1988) finds that 60% of black students in South Africa reported feeling a lack of integration in university due to perception that their social and political needs were not represented in the universities.

Sennett, Finchilescu, Gibson and Straus (2003), conducted a study in South African universities with the aim of exploring the adjustment of black African students to previously white universities. They found no significant differences between black African and white participants on academic adjustment nor institutional commitment however, black African participants reported significantly poorer levels of social adjustment and poorer levels of personal-emotional adjustment, accountable for these challenges was language differences, poor levels and quality of education, financial strain, housing related issues and the stress of having left home (Sennett, et, al. 2003).

A study conducted by Flisher, De Beer and Bokhorst (2002) with the aim of documenting the characteristics of students who received counselling services at the University of Cape Town, found that black women, between the ages 20-24-year-old, non-English speaking, who were first-year undergraduates, humanities students, eligible to receive financial assistance and students from outside Cape Town were significantly more likely to receive counselling. There is no evidence that all economically disadvantaged university students have the same university experience. Therefore, it is important to look at the meanings held by students who are economically disadvantaged and explore some of the shared meanings that may play a role in making it more challenging for them to adjust to university life.

2.7. A consumerist society: Social trends and economic disadvantage

The transition in the socio-political domains in South Africa have not only had an impact on political but also on social, economic and cultural life (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). Post-Apartheid, South African black youth are finding a place in society, they seem to be adapting with resilience (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). There is a huge acceptance of western ideologies by South Africans which in turn leads the youth to struggle in finding and defining themselves in a way that will allow them to cope with social shifts (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). These social shifts include the growing similarities between American and South African societies (the shopping malls, the clothing trends, music and fashion) (Campbell, 1998).

The level of acceptance of materialistic trends within South African societies is marked by a high conformity to consumption practices (Campbell, 1998). Strategies to market and normalize these consumption trends were primarily designed to infiltrate urban affluent citizens which in South Africa are represented by the white community (Campbell, 1998). The trend for consumption is growing over the years and more people are accepting it as a normal and necessary way of living. (Campbell, 1998 &

Dittmar, 2008). There is a growing culture of consumption that is represented by aspects of consumption that go beyond consumption, it is marked by the emotional meanings that people attach to material things (Dittmar, 2008). The level of consumption penetrates indirectly on the existing social cultures through global expansion and channels spread it to the public i.e. telemarketing, social media, companies designed with the basis intention to advertise and promote this lifestyle global (Dittmar, 2008).

One of the major channels to normalise the consumer culture is through marketing of celebrity lives as a normal and acceptable way of living, of gaining popularity, social acceptance and overall happiness (Dittmar, 2008). Earlier research highlighted that the pattern of consumption in South Africa continues to evolve as the affluent class gets more privilege to indirectly decide which trends are welcomed in the country (Firat & Dholakia, 1998). Over the years, these decisions have worked their way down the hierarchy, infiltrating the lower classes (Dittmar, 2008). Ultimately disadvantaged societies adopt and comply with these trends as normal social practice regardless of their socio-economic realities (Firat & Dholakia, 1998; Dittmar, 2008).

Publicity images are used to appeal to people's interests, to promote and depict consumption and ownership of material trends as one of the ways to gain internal happiness (Berger, 1972). It is not everyone that accepts these principles however, a huge part of what advertisers aim to do is to convince people that an acceptable and superior social identity relies on ownership of material things and following of trends (Berger, 1972).

One factor that may potentially incapacitate students' adjustment to university environment are the intrinsic values of the individual students. Intrinsic values are internal needs of which when fulfilled lead to well-being and internal happiness (James, 2007). These values are what drive people to desire a certain lifestyle and not another (James, 2007). For some people, the intrinsic values are constantly in battle with the need to pursue material rewards perceived as a source of happiness (James, 2007). Pursuing happiness through material rewards has its implications, essentially, not everyone is able to afford material things, though in modern society, acquiring them gives some social status (Dittmar, 2008; James, 2007).

A social status is one's position in society, a valued membership (De Botton, 2004; Dittmar, 2008). Obtaining a highly ranked social status, gives an individual some level of attention and admiration from some members of society (De Botton, 2004; Dittmar, 2008). For an example, those with a low ranked social status do not receive the same level of positive attention and admiration (De Botton, 2004; Dittmar, 2008). For some individuals, a highly ranked social status based on material possessions is perceived as

an integral part of their being (De Botton, 2004; Dittmar, 2008). Material possessions tends to give people a sense of control and sometimes material objects give emotional comfort and enhance interpersonal relationships (Dittmar, 2008). Clothes may for example be used as possessions in which one gains a social status, they are a symbol of trendy and popular, however, social identity has boundaries that extend beyond the physical body, the meaning attached to material possessions, reinforces the value of the status (Dittmar, 2008).

A study was conducted on students at the Grahamstown Campus of Rhodes University, South Africa, between the years 1998 to 2001. The aim of the study was to examine the way various local youth used global media texts as part of their attempts to make sense of their lives. The results suggested that youth today are becoming more influenced by American social trends (leisure time in front of the television and computers, similar tunes, clothing style, and food) (Strelitz, 2004). The article argues that, in public spaces, local identities are constructed out of material and symbolic resources that may not be local in origin but still considered authentic (Strelitz, 2004). The findings highlighted that the media, especially American films and television programs play a huge role in the process of everyday interaction among the youths (Strelitz, 2004). The depth at which Western social trends have infiltrated the culture of South African youth has led to a shift from a collective society an individualistic one (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). Social trends allow them to cope with the new socio-historical shift, however; it is the same social trends that further alienate them from their social realities (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997).

One may argue that, in order to forge their way through university, students must not only feel competent but must have actual competence, self-esteem, strategies and resources to cope with challenges of being a student (Bojuwone, 2002). This does not only apply to their academics but also to the social environment of the university. If a new student feels different from the average university student, he/she may experience an inability to feel a sense of belonging thus impending on their well-being while at university (Bojuwone, 2002). It can be argued that because of changes in the economic trends of South Africa, those that now fall under the economically disadvantaged groups have access to more opportunities in life (Kagee, Naidoo & Mahatey, 1997). Studies show that because of the social differences between the affluent social class communities and the rural communities in South Africa, economically disadvantaged youth are vulnerable to social alienation and shifts in social roles that may have an impact on their identities and psychological well-being (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997).

Studies highlight that South Africa is slowly embracing western social trends which in turn, clash with their social realities (Stevens & Lockhat, 1997; Strelitz, 2004). For this research, the university

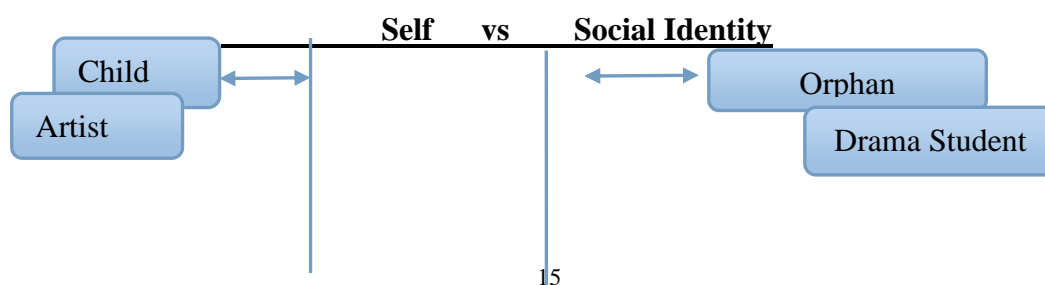
environment was considered perceived as a diverse social institution. A number of people with different social identities interact on daily bases within this institution. One cannot assume that all the students that who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds share a mutual feeling regarding their sense of self and sense of belonging experiences at university level.

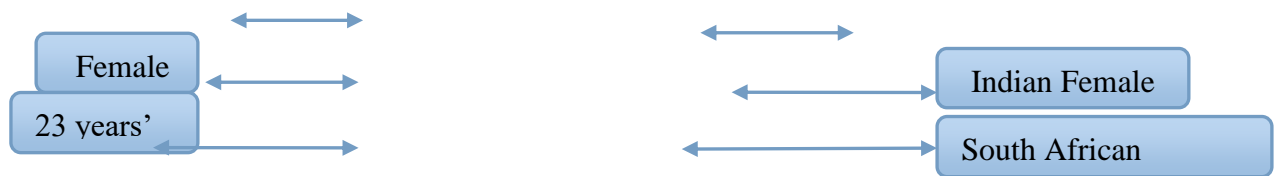
2.8 . Theoretical framework: Social Identity theory

Social Identity theory was developed by Henri Tajfel in 1979 with an intention to understand group behaviour, the influences behind why and how people identify or discriminate against a group of people. Social identity theorists have argued that people tend to define themselves according to their membership within a social group leading to a commitment to the group status and exclusion of non-members (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Social identity is part of the individual's self-concepts that are derived from knowledge of being a member of a social group (Brown, 2000; Howard, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals generally have organized knowledge about the self and a way to identify themselves within a group. This knowledge is referred to as 'cognitive schemas' (Howard, 2000). Individuals attach value and emotional significance to the membership and that determines the strength of and commitment to the perceived social identity (Howard, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The status that comes with one's social identity may or may not enhance one's self-esteem within the social group (Howard, 2000).

A social identity that enhances one's self-esteem within a group generally facilitates positive adjustment in new environments and social settings (Howard, 2000). Social situations that occur within settings are better handled when an individual has a frame of reference in which to interpret their actions and social situations (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Brown 2000; Howard, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, an individual who understands their status and class in society is better adjusted in to the social settings as compared to one that is not clear about who they are and what role to play within a social group (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Brown 2000; Howard, 2000). Identities are multidimensional, fluid and contextual; an individual may take up more than one role in a group (Fay, 1996). One's ability to reconstruct their identity is determined by the extent to which they have access to material, linguistic, social, cultural resources that are valued within the dominant discourses (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005).





Multidimensional, contextual, fluid (Fay, 1996).

The social settings within which these identities are constructed are not always similar nor are they constant. In the process, people evaluate their social identities in order to allow for an adjustment that is in accordance with the perceived experiences within the social settings (Howard, 2000; Campbell, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In a study conducted by Campbell (1997) with the aim of understanding how youth from Umlazi (Durban, KwaZulu-Natal) construct their social identities in the new democratic South Africa, Campbell states that,

“In the process of social identity construction, the individual engages in a process of debate and negotiation which involves continually weighing up the recipes for living provided by available group membership in the light of life challenges posed by the social and material world” (p.28).

During the process of social Identity construction, one is not always aware of their surroundings and impact on their actions, the choices made in social interactions nor the feelings evoked by social situations (Howard, 2000; Campbell, 1997). It is perhaps why, Tajfel and Turner (1979) earlier proposed three processes that occur in the process of one’s social identity construction and these are, social categorization; social identification and social comparison.

2.8.1. Categorization

Categorization is a process of labelling the self and other people based on differences or sameness, hence categories of race, sexuality, social class, religion and many more (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Individuals create categories of “them and us/ I”; this is used to understand their own place in society (Mach, 1993; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Tuner, 1979). Social categorization is a process whereby an individual assesses whether they belong to the in-group or the out-group, the latter refers to a group that is perceived as different from the one in which the individual identifies with (in-group) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These categories can only exist in contrast with an out-group, this is when a person sees the self as (rich

versus the poor); (black versus white) and once this process occurs, the individual begins to respond to the other person as members of a group than as individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

2.8.2. Social Identification

According to Brown (2000); Stets and Burke (2000), social identification occurs when an individual develops self-esteem about being a member of a social group. Campbell (1997) argues that individuals tend to identify with a group that allows them to feel social competence or self-esteem and that in-group members become part of the individual's social circle. One can argue that, the process of identification is highly determined by one's perceived ability to fit in and belong within the in-group. This perceived ability to belong is well developed when one does not feel different but has the ability to adjust to the norms, values, traditions and behaviour of the group (Brown, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000). Perceived sameness perpetuates bias towards in-group members and which in turn, perpetuates stigmatization of out-group members (Lurge, Zosuls & Rubble, 2008). During this process, an individual cease to see the self as just an individual but as a member of a larger group. Once in-group status is achieved, normative aspects of group membership are prioritized (Lurge, Zosuls & Rubble, 2008).

2.8.3. Comparison

In order to enhance self-image and reaffirm perceived difference from the out-group, an individual constantly seeks out negative aspects of the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The process of comparison opens up a platform for prejudiced views and stereotyping of out-group to take place (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Stereotyping is defined as the tendency to put people in 'boxes based on opinion and exaggerated differences and similarities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Comparison is not always done to discriminate people, rather to assist in daily interactions such as being able to identify the right people for the right needs, e.g. A new learner going into a school and identifying which people to refer to as the learners and or teachers based on their uniforms, behaviour and age (Tylor, Fiske, Etcoff and Ruderman, 1978). Comparison in the latter sense assists individuals to navigate their way in society.

There is a tendency to casually use stereotypes when people compare themselves with members of an out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). People tend to overgeneralize the differences; this facilitates comparison through making members of an out-group to appear more similar to each other than they actually are (Taylor, et al. 1978). Comparison is facilitated by previously held information and assumptions about a group of people (Lurge, Zosuls & Rubble, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Taylor, et al. 1978). In the presence of stereotyping and stigmatization, there is a possibility for negative or lack of

social interaction between groups to occur (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Brown, 2000; Howard, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The lack of interaction further reinforces the belief that members or behaviour of an out-group are similar to each other (Lurge, Zosuls & Rubble, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Taylor, et al. 1978).

2.8.4. Social Identity Construction

Campbell (1997) in a study on the youth of Umlazi, a location in KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. The focus of the study was the negotiation of social identity construction; the results indicate that their negotiation of social identity was guided by a degree of commitment to their interpretation of respectability, self-improvement and personal or community empowerment. This particular analysis of social construction recognizes the importance of the individual's need to be part of a group, and the need to have a social role within that group. If a particular group does not accommodate the individual's understanding of who they are in society, the individual has an option to not identify with the group (Campbell, 1997). There are instances, however, whereby an individual is unable to establish a sense of belonging with the social group even when they want to. If an individual is unable to identify themselves with the existing group due to social rejection or difference, they may experience a sense of alienation from the members of that group and the social process that occur in that environment (Newman & Newman, 1976; Rudo & Gaidzanwa, 2007).

Alienation has a negative impact on the individual's sense of self and competency within that group (Rudo & Gaidzanwa, 2007). Bangeni and Kapp (2005) argue that, the perceived difference experienced by some previously disadvantaged students in university is due to the predominant boundaries such as language, lack of access to resources, unfamiliarity to the western culture and other things that they do not experience when in their homes.

2.8.5. Social Identity and Adjustment

Ostrone and Long (2007) in a study sampling 322 university students address the extent to which social class position impacts on one's sense of belonging at college and the way in which belonging informs adjustment at college. They find that social class background was significantly associated with a sense of belonging but not the quality of experience at college, suggesting that class background only had an impact on the student's overall adjustment based on their sense of belonging within the university. This further suggests that a sense of belonging is a significant factor in one's experience of social settings.

Universities in South Africa are characterized by diverse social groups. A sense of belonging and competence both have a significant role to play in how students adjust to university life (Rudo & Gaidzanwa, 2007). The value and emotional significance attached to a social membership determines the strength of one's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). An individual can have a long history of social categories that they belonged to (communities, gender, race, age, and social class), their sense of self carries aspects of different social identities (Brown, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000).

It is argued that within the changing contexts, people tend to classify members of a particular social context as "they or us" and the categorization is made stronger by social factors existing within that context (Mach, 1993). The key assumption of the social identity theory is that people are intrinsically motivated to achieve a positive distinctiveness and that they strive for a positive sense of self (Serap, Filiz & Unsal, 2015). People are born into an already existing social state, e.g. wealth or poverty (Serap, Filiz, & Unsal, 2015; Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Mach, 1993). Their social state provides a structure for self-definition and because people are motivated towards a self-concept, they use the state of the society in which they reside as a point of social comparison (Serap, et al., 2015; Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Brown, 2000; Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Howard, 2000; Mach, 1993; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Those who belong to an inferior group fail to reach a positive sense of self (Felski, 2000).

In comparison to the wealthy, the poor experience a negative sense of self (Felski, 2000). Furthermore, the poor experience a shame that is caused and maintained by being around a group of wealthy people whom they perceive as better (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002). The feelings of shame cause low self-esteem and constant embarrassment (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002). The poor people engage in active intergroup comparison; through this process, negative emotions are evoked causing them to experience greater psychological distress regarding the self (Rojas, 2008). Tajfel (1978) argues that when negativity stems from one's social identity, individuals attempt to improve their situation through identity management strategies; the latter is a process of altering the negative aspects a social identity. The identity management strategies include individual mobility, social creativity and collective competition (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008).

Individual mobility involves leaving the group either behaviourally or psychologically. This is done so that the individual minimizes the negative feelings experienced due to their social identity (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). Collective strategy involves direct competition with out-group in order to reverse group status. This may be done through social behaviour such as labelling, stereotyping,

social withdrawal and exclusion (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). The lower status group members become active in establishing a noticeable position in society and do so collectively (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). The two strategies may occur without the individual's awareness to their actions; they are played out in social interactions. The difference between the two strategies is that, individual mobility becomes a strategy to rescue the self from negative feelings that come with the social identity whereas in collective strategy, individuals assume a defensive role against the 'out-group' members.

The third strategy is social creativity. This strategy involves a re-evaluation of comparison context, individuals do not change their identity but work towards establishing a positive sense of self, for example, a change in social definition by emphasizing the superior aspect of the in-group identity (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). Individuals focus on the possibility of positive change in due time while embracing their currently held identity and use it as an empowering tool to create a positive sense of self within society (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). As with the first two strategies, social creativity is not always a conscious decision (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). Identity management strategies depend on perceived social structural relations between given stability in their life while belonging to a particular social group, legitimacy in their membership and permeability of boundaries within social settings (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002). Stability is the group member's beliefs about the possibility of changing the level of difference between in-group and out-group. Permeability of boundaries is the perceived probability of alleviation to high status groups and legitimacy is the group's perception of fairness and justice caused by the difference between them and the out-group members (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002).

Serap, Filiz and Unsal (2015) explores the narratives of the poor and their preferred identity management strategies. Results note that out of the 50 participants, 22 defined themselves as poor in comparison to the rest the population based on ability to afford a house, a car and to provide better education for their children. The study indicates that inability to afford material assets was a common factor used by participants to establish their level of wealth or lack thereof. The study further shows that participants generally followed an inexpensive budget for daily essentials; they shared a similar style in clothing, house designs and diet (Serap, et al., 2015). With regards to their identity management strategies, the 22 participants who considered themselves poor resorted to social creativity. The use of this strategy was facilitated by the belief that poverty will be reduced in future and that change will bring stability (Serap, et al., 2015). Lack of material things led to fear of being embarrassed, humiliation in everyday talk, and fear of being discriminated against and being 'othered' (Serap, et al., 2015; Diener & Biswas-Dineier,

2002; Felski, 2000). There is a common trend by people who are poor to be constantly tortured by fear of shame, failure or lack in the eyes of the wealthier group (Serap, et al., 2015; Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Felski, 2000).

2.9 . Conclusion

This chapter focused on unpacking the social and political history of South Africa and its impact on the socio-economic status of South African citizens. It reviewed the adjustment of economically disadvantaged students within South African universities focusing on social practices and identity issues among the student population. Social identity theory emphasizes the importance of group membership in understanding how people deal with social challenges that arise within social settings. The chapter further unpacked the social identity theory in the process of student adjustment at university. Using foundations of this theory, links were made between the economic backgrounds of students and social experiences at university as means of understanding whether their social roles change when they reach university and whether they encounter any social pressure due to their social background. The next chapter will outline the research methodology and the research process, research paradigm, research approach, sample and demographics

CHAPTER 3

Research methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the research methods used in the study. The chapter consists of the following, research paradigm and approach; sample description, recruitment strategies and data analysis. The latter part of the chapter is a discussion of measures taken in order to ensure that the process of data collection and data analysis was conducted to an acceptable measure of truthfulness and with consideration of the appropriate ethical requirements.

3.2 Research paradigm and approach

According to MacNaughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2001), a research paradigm must comprise of a belief about acquired knowledge, methodology and a criterion for validity. Each research paradigm is built on different assumptions about knowledge, reality and values hence elicits different orientations to research. This study followed an interpretive paradigm. This paradigm seeks to understand human experience through a subjective experience of each participant (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). In this research, each student's encounter with the university was considered to be a unique experience. An interpretive paradigm accommodates multiple versions of the truth and this is founded by the premise that, reality is socially constructed and is understood through the subjective, complex and ever changing human experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

The interpretive paradigm accommodated the qualitative methods of research; non-random selection of participants based their knowledge about questions asked (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). In order to apply the appropriate tools to conduct this research, a qualitative research design was adopted. This design allowed the researcher to generate information and develop an in depth understanding of what meanings were attributed by the participant to their social encounters on campus. Qualitative research aimed to explore the individual's version of the truth and to present it without any bias and manipulation from the researcher (Marshall, 1996; Ulin, Robinson, Tolley, & Mcneil, 2002). The researcher used interviews to ask broad research questions designed to explore and understand the social context within which the participants are a part. (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

The data gathering process within this design allowed for face to face interactions with the participants. The researcher specifically chose a qualitative research design as means to not only gather the data, but to also capture meaningful interpretations of the experiences of participants. Ultimately, the goal was to be able to capture the participants own interpretations of what it means to be economically disadvantaged students at university. Understanding the background of the proposed research problem and extensive literature review assisted the researcher to identify the people who would become part of the research and how those people would be approached.

3.3 Sample and Sampling technique

Sarantakos (1993) described sampling as the process of choosing research units of the target population which are to be included in the study. The sample for this study was chosen through purposive sampling methods. The chosen participants were chosen based on their knowledge and experience (Palys, 2008). The chosen participants were identified and approached because of experience with the proposed topic thus would best provide the information needed to meet the objectives and aim of the research topic. The sample for this research was chosen within the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, and School of Applied Sciences. Once ethical clearance was granted by the school's Dean, Registrar and Ethical committee, (See attached appendix 4, 5 & 6). Weekly time tables were used as schedule to access participants. Both male and female undergraduate students were approached in groups before and after lectures.

A sample group that is chosen based on similar characteristics and knowledge about the topic forms a homogenous group (Palys, 2008). Choosing homogenous group had less to do with the representation of a larger population but more to do with gathering comprehensive knowledge about the experiences of chosen participants (Palys, 2008). Participants for this study were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Enrolled as first/second year undergraduate students at the university of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Collage Campus, in the School of Applied Human Sciences,
- Originally from areas geographically recognized as rural,
- Matriculated in high-schools recognized by the Department of Education as previously disadvantaged,
- Family income must indicate a disadvantaged economic background according to the criteria stipulated by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (R150 000 per annum).

Once they were briefed about the participant profiles, willing students met up with the researcher individually to discuss in detail what was requested of them and arrange to meet for discussion.

Snowballing techniques were later used while recruiting participants in order to easily access more participants. Snowballing technique required that the researcher ask participants to refer and recommend other people that had the same knowledge as them (Bernad, 2002; Palys, 2008). In practice, students who had already agreed to participate in the research provided names of potential participants based on their shared experiences. Bernard (2002) maintains that in purposive sampling, people will generally have more knowledge of other eligible candidates who can best provide knowledge and explain the meanings attached to the shared experience. The students who were approached first were willing to provide names of other fellow students who were suitable and be might willing to participate in the research. The final number of participants that made up the sample used in this study was a total of 19 students, Black African, undergraduate students within the School of Applied Sciences. The participants consisted of 9 females and 10 males ranging between the ages, 18 and 25. They were all enrolled as first or second year undergraduate students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Collage Campus, in the School of Applied Human Sciences. They were all originally from areas geographically recognized as rural and had matriculated in high-schools recognized by the Department of Education as previously disadvantaged. The last common similar status of the participants was that their family income was less than R150 000 per annum.

3.4 Data collection

Data collection was used a bridge between literature review, theoretical background and the reality of the experiences of the participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). As a scientific method, the process of data collection required that the researcher commits to thorough preparation (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). Once this researcher compiled a list of willing participants, appropriate times for meeting were arranged over the phone. Times were arranged based on the participant's availability. Focus groups were used as method of data collection. Focus groups are an enquiry method of data collection where by the researcher sits with participants who share a common experience for at least one to two hours, the researcher uses an interview guide to probe for open discussions around a chosen topic and records the discussions to ensure accurate capturing of data (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). The focus groups were chosen because they allowed for an open discussion guided by a semi structured method of questioning (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). The researcher wanted to be able to interact with the participants in a setting that would allow participation and open discussion. Focus groups are a controlled method that allows for open discussions and interaction between the researcher and many participants simultaneously (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). The focus groups sessions were spread across three days, two of the groups had six

students and the last group consisted of seven students. The total number of participants was 19 students. The focus groups took place for 50 plus minutes each at venue C1, Multi-Media Building at Howard College Campus.

In preparation for data collection, the researcher used a semi structured questioner schedule (See Appendix 1). The semi structured questioner schedule is a tool used in qualitative research, it contains open ended list of subjects to cover around chosen topic (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). The aim of the semi-structured interview schedule was to guide the interview process but allow the researcher room to probe for in depth details to the topic (Holstein & Gubrium, 1999). The researcher's themes were used to start up the discussions. Early stages of the focus group discussions were mainly dedicated to orientate the participants and to allow them to become comfortable enough to participate during the discussions. Confidentiality and respect were emphasized by the researcher as important aspects of the discussion. This was done to create a safe and warm environment for the participants. To reiterate the importance of these two concepts during the meetings, participants were required to sign a confidentiality form (See appendix 3). The participants agreed to communicate both in English in their mother tongue, majority of the participants stated that they felt more comfortable speaking in IsiZulu during the interviews. To ensure proper recording of the data, the researcher used both tape recording and note taking as methods of capturing data. The participants had to sign a consent form (See Appendix 2a & 2b) to participate and to grant the researcher permission to use these methods of data collection. All the data collected during the discussions was safely stored in the privacy and exclusive access to the researcher and supervisor.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, the researcher sorted through it in order to prepare for the process of data analysis. The chosen and appropriate method of analysis is thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a method used within qualitative research; the method focuses on identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Themes refer to identifiable ideas that link to each other and they emerge from the collected data (Ibrahim, 2012). This method of analysis follows six steps, the analysis begins with the researcher getting familiar with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming them, then finally reproducing the report (Braun & Clarke; 2006). Criticism towards this method of analysis has pointed out that there is huge misuse of the method by omission of some aspects of data in the process of analysis. The criticism points out that the latter is caused by the challenge to correctly implement the vague guidelines given in literature. In order to avoid this error, the researcher was careful to pay attention and to have a critical understanding of the

recommended guidelines of data analysis and to further ensure an authentic and clearly presented process to data collection. This type of analysis was chosen because of its broad strategies to ensure that provided data is presented with authenticity and order without losing the meanings participants attach to it. Data were collected through a process of 3 focus groups. The total number of participants was 19 undergraduate students (9 Females and 10 Males) between the ages of 18 and 25. The data for this research were analysed by this researcher and the following is a summary of the analytical process.

3.5.1. Getting Familiar with the Data

In order to get familiar with the data, the researcher's initial thoughts and ideas were noted during the focus groups and later made journal notes while listening to the recordings. The transcription process included listening and editing and re-listening of audio recordings. This was done to ensure careful and accurate transcription of the interview discussion. Furthermore, this was done to carefully organize and evaluate all the important information and note information that was either missed during the data collection process or not captured correctly in the recording, e.g. facial expressions. Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that, in order to be immersed in the data, researchers need to repeatedly listen to recordings and note all the important questions and thoughts. This process allowed for the researcher to move to the second stage of data analysis.

3.5.2. Generating Codes

The notes and comments were organized and linked with each other in order to find and match common patterns. This was done through the process of coding. The researcher was careful to code data without presumption and bias. This process allowed for the researcher to group information and find common links within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the process of coding the data, the researcher then continued to search for themes.

3.5.3. Searching for themes and reviewing themes

The two steps as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed simultaneously over a period of time and repeated several times. The process of searching for themes involved matching and collating

codes into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reviewing themes was a step to gather all data relevant to each potential theme and evaluating all the transcripts to ensure that the potential themes were neither overlapping nor ignored (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process included checking if the themes work in relation to the coded data. The latter process was continuous throughout the process of data analysis.

3.5.4. Defining and naming

The fifth step of data analysis was to create an overall link in the story; naming and defining the themes create a clear pattern in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). On-going analysis to refine the specifications of each theme ensured that there were no overlaps in the themes and sub-themes. Themes were developed by grouping codes in the data using thematic maps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher was able to identify the link in the themes and carefully organized data in a manner that presents rich and important information about the topic. The themes were named as follows: Orientation, Culture Shock, Self-perception, and Labelling: A social barrier and finally, Social support. These were revised repeatedly in order to ensure that all the data was represented in a manner that captured the true experiences of the participants.

3.5.5. Producing the report

The themes were named and defined and this allowed the researcher to continue with the process of data analysis which is presented later in this paper. In order to analyse the data, the researcher made a selection of extracts that reflect the overriding themes and used literature to try and present them in a scientific framework. The following results presented in short extracts unpack the experiences of economically disadvantaged undergraduate students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

3.6. Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, testing for reliability and validity are used in order to ensure that data collection strategies produce accurate results, that are not harmful to the participants and can be generalized to the

wider population (Long & Johnson; 2000). Qualitative research uses more interactive methods of data collection, the researcher is immersed in the process thus, bias and assumptions on the side of the researcher become part of research process (Golafshani, 2003). In qualitative research, the concept of trustworthiness is rather more appropriate granted; the researcher is able to account for how the research process ensured trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis (Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004; Morrow, 2005). Trustworthiness of the study was determined through an evaluation of the following concepts, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004; Morrow, 2005).

In order to ensure a credible study, a researcher needs to provide a true presentation of the experiences and environment of the participants through engaging with them for a long period of time (Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004, Morrow, 2005). In this study, the researcher initially researched literature and theory in order to have a background understanding of the main concepts of the topic. The second step was to choose participants guided by the sample description and engage with them through focus group discussions. By interviewing the participants face to face, the researcher was able to ask, probe and clarify the information provided by participants.

Dependability refers to how well this researcher gives a clear and detailed description of the methods, such as research designs, sampling methods and data collection procedures and how they were used in the study (Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004, Morrow, 2005). In this study, a qualitative method of research and a theoretical framework theory was used as a foundation in the research process and to help the researcher understand the aim of the research. Furthermore, by providing the research objectives, questions, sample description, this researcher was able to follow and justify the procedure in her method to data collection and analysis.

In this study, confirmability and transferability were ensured through the use of triangulation and supervision. Triangulation refers to the process of using different methods in data collection (Shenton, 2004). The usage of semi structured interviews, tape recorder and making notes of the interview was a useful method to ensure that the researcher engages with the participants but does not mistaken her own opinions for those of the participants. Confirmability is demonstrated in the ability of the researcher to produce an objective report and to otherwise indicate any bias and assumptions made during the research process (Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004, Morrow, 2005). During the data collection process, the researcher recorded the interviews on a tape recorder and on a journal as means of ensuring accurate

capturing of data. Supervision opened up a platform for reflection and critical evaluation of the researcher's methods (Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004).

Transferability focuses in the generalizability of the results. The researcher should otherwise indicate if the results cannot represent the bigger population (Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004, Morrow, 2005). Data triangulation in qualitative research is ensured through proper use of listening skills and probing during interviews (Shenton, 2004). The sample provides an insight into the experiences of economically disadvantaged student population in South Africa it however; it cannot be generalized to the whole population of economically disadvantaged students.

3.7. Reflexivity

It was stated in the rationale that the researcher is a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal with a previous economically disadvantaged back ground. The similarities in the experiences of the researcher and the participants emerged several times during data collection and the data analysis. The researcher is fully aware of the influence that her own experiences might have had on the process of this research. Birch (1998) argued that in exploring research, researchers bring their own subjective interpretation of data, judgements and assumptions based on their own similar experiences. It was a critical step for the researcher to constantly evaluate her own meanings and subjective perceptions around the topic. The researcher kept a reflective diary and used supervision sessions to ensure that all data and theoretical background was reviewed in relationship to her own experience and to acknowledge the similarities (Birch, 1998). The data analysis process cannot be without judgment and subjectivity, thus the researcher constantly reviewed scholarly articles and other research in order to inform the process of research with valid information and data (Birch, 1998). In acknowledging her own experience, the researcher was able to constantly reflect on the data provided in order to identify her own voice and underlying assumptions (Birch, 1998). To further ensure reflexivity, the researcher provided extracts so as to allow an authentic presentation of data given by the participants and used a theoretical framework in order presents the data without personal presumptions. In qualitative research, the researcher may influence in the process of data collection and analysis thus, an initial acknowledgement of the subjectivity assists in constantly reviewing the data and the methods used to collect the data

3.8. Ethical Considerations

An ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Permission was also obtained from the gatekeeper, in this case, School of Applied Sciences Registrar's office. Ethical principles were adhered to; these include informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity. This study did not cause secondary victimization and trauma; however, stressful emotions were evoked in some participants. In order to minimise this risk, students, were asked for their consent to participate. In order to have the students give consent on their own, only students over the age of eighteen were selected to take part in the focus groups. A confidentiality clause was handed to students prior to the group discussions.

Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the focus group if they felt the need. Participants were informed prior to the focus groups about Howard College School of Applied Sciences Student Counselling services. As a trained counsellor, the researcher monitored the participant's responses and reactions to the discussion during focus group interviews to particularly identify participants that might be stressed or upset, to then offer support.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology used in the study. It has described the research paradigm and design, sample description and recruitment strategies, data collection procedure and instruments, data analysis, a discussion about trustworthiness and finally ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4

Results and discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and discuss the results. The main focus of the chapter will be to identify themes which present the experiences of economically disadvantaged, undergraduate students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The themes captured the experiences of the participants in their undergraduate years at Howard College Campus.

4.2. Results

Following the guidelines of thematic analysis, the transcripts were summed up into 5 concepts/ themes. The themes are named as follows:

i) Orientation:

- Locating campus
- Ukuthuthiza (disorientation)

ii) Culture shock

- Language
- Trends

iii) Self-perceptions

- Potential
- Gender Differences

iv) Labelling: a social barrier

- Perceived privilege
- fashion trends
- Friendships
- labelling

v) Social support.

- Social/Emotional Support
- Adjustment

4.2.1. Orientation

This theme captures the experiences of new students in the first few days at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus. All the participants could clearly remember the first few days of registration and the first week of classes. Out of the 19 participants, three stated that they arrived a week before the registration day in order to self-orientate. The rest of the participants indicated that they all struggled navigating their way around campus and that the experience not only heightened their anxiety but evoked feelings of incompetence, loneliness and frustration. The theme, orientation umbrellas the following sub-themes: Locating campus and Ukuthithiza (disorientation).

4.2.1.1. Locating campus

Majority of the students stated that they struggled finding the campus and that they came from home to register without the company neither a family member nor a friend. The majority of the participants reported lack of money as a reason for coming to register without anyone accompanying them.

Male participant 1:

“My mother could not afford to pay for two people to come to Durban, so I had to miss orientation week and come for registration on my own.”

In the focus group discussions, it was established that, getting lost and struggling to find the venues was part of the process. The participants however, reported that their response to the process was not the same. While some stated that they coped well, some reported feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, lonely and sad and while trying to locate certain venues and resources on campus.

Male Participant 6:

“I got lost and ended up at Westville Campus, miscommunication with the taxi drivers, (group laughter and probing), I know, I know, anyway, people at Westville are very cold and unapproachable. By the end of that day I already had that perception about UKZN as a whole.”

Female Participant 10:

"I ...Oh my God! around one o'clock my shoe was ruined. I walked bare foot. I went and sat on the park and cried because I thought it's a day wasted and no one helped me and I thought that the next one will be the same."

There was consensus among the participants that before getting lost, attempts were made to enquire about the directions and assistance. Those who succeeded reported that it became easier to navigate their way overtime. Failure to follow instructions or get assistance was associated with overwhelming feelings of sadness. Participants further reported a series of experiences that left them feeling overwhelmed. Crying, which was brought about by feelings of confusion was reported more by female students who went through the registration period on their own.

Female Participant 8:

"I had so much to do and I was too confused and alone, I felt overwhelmed."

Female Participant 2:

"Around about 10h30, I lost my favourite cardigan that my Gogo bought me. I left someone where I was sitting and I went to the bathroom, when I came back it was gone. That taught me to never trust anyone I first met. And yes, I went to the bathrooms and I cried a lot."

Participants stated that they spent most of what was supposed to be registration time and first week of classes attempting to find their way around campus. Participants that were able to make it to orientation week and those that spent time before the registration week doing self-orientation on campus did not struggle as much during the registration process.

Male Participant 2:

"I avoided that all together, I came a week before registration and walked around the campus, that way by the time registration started, I knew where to go."

Male Participant 7:

"I remember very well it was very easy for me because I had been on campus for like a week before."

The participants who were able to stay with relatives either in town or surrounding locations were the ones who managed to come to campus before registration and self-orientate.

4.2.1.2. Ukuthithiza (disorientation)

Participants acknowledged that there were people stationed to assist them to navigate campus. They stated however that, there were not enough people stationed to attend to all the students in time and some participants reported that they were not confident enough to ask for directions.

Male Participant 5:

“No one seemed to know a thing except for the security guards who at least had time to help you.”

Female Participant 8,

“Mentors came and showed us (First years) buildings. As soon as they showed us a building, I forgot the names. I was still scared to ask them so I just followed the signs or asked the security guards.”

The participants reported that they were not familiar with the proceedings of the registration process and that going through the process on their own made them feel disorientated.

Male Participant 8:

“Well... first thing I did when I arrived at Howard College was that I stood in the wrong queue! Ukuthithiza kodwa nje (disorientation) “

Male Participant 6

“I also had been standing for a very long time in the wrong queue, so when I got to the right queue I did not ask anything I just joined, I felt frustrated”
[Group Laughs].

Female participant 8:

“Uhm.....I kept seeing the same group of first year students at Housing offices, we were all a bit scared, we were all in the dark about what is happening, besizthithizela nje (acting disorientation).”

On top of the frustration caused by the challenge of locating offices and people on campus, participants stated that they were unsure and lacked information on which modules they were supposed to take. They further expressed shock at the use of computers and that they felt an expectation to these skills without having had previous computer training.

Female Participant 4:

“Even the registration process was so frustrating, administrators acted as if you are supposed to know and that made me feel slow.” [group laughs; agreements].

Female participant 2:

“I knew I was coming to register for social work but I had no clue which modules I was supposed to register for.”

Male participant 4:

“Yes, like you would have heard about Psychology before but you have no clue what that is...whether you are supposed to register for it...so you end up choosing modules with familiar names.”

Male Participant 5:

“Ha ha, you end up picking anything that ends with logy-.” [Group laughter].

Female Student 7:

“As if that was not enough, they told us we had to register on-line, hey! There I had problems! [Laughs]”

Above all the challenges reported by the participants, the one that caused most anxiety and frustration was their computer illiteracy.

Male participant 10:

“We did not have computer classes at high school; it was scary because you had no clue. The guy who helped us register just told me to sit down and log on, I had no clue what was going on, where to touch and what to do. That was only the beginning!”

By the time the classes started, participants reported already feeling frustrated and under prepared.

Female Participant 9:

“I was late for my classes and still did not know most of the lecture venues. By the end of the day I had not attended anything just walking and looking for lecture venues.” [Group laughs] “I felt so guilty for missing so many classes.”

4.2.2. Culture Shock.

This theme captures the opinions of the participants after the frustrations of getting orientated in the university. After making their own observations around campus, some participants stated that the general use of language and the following of fashion trends among the student population had an interesting and unfamiliar role to play in the social interactions on campus. Thus, the theme umbrellas two sub-themes: Language and Trends.

4.2.2.1. Language

Some participants reported that they initially felt different from other students. One of the things that made them feel different was the use language. Participants reported that they felt more alienated when they compared themselves to other Black South African students on campus than when compared with students of other racial groups, i.e., Indian, White and Coloured and other.

Male Participant 4:

“It is so different here, the language, people here speak English and in high school you never did that. Every corner you walk into; people are busy talking English even when it is not necessary.”

Male Participant 6:

“Yeah hey, and not that my English sucks but now suddenly, you are in a class addressing lecturers by first names, and students communicate in English all the time, students outside speak English, even black Zulu students when they are together.”

Male participants 5:

“In high school, you were taught English in your mother tongue.” [Group laughter].

Female Participant 6:

“People here do not greet. At home, you stop to sincerely greet people, here people give you a look and you are not sure whether they are smiling or scared of you?” [Group laughter].

Language was a huge marker of cultural difference and participants were vocal about their disapproval for when black students who speak the same native tongue chose to communicate to each other in English.

4.2.2.2 Trends

Fashion and ownership of gadgets or lack thereof was something was reported to participants that made them feel different from the rest of the student group. They reported that the pressure to follow fashion and trends was bigger for female students as compared to male students.

Male Participant 10:

“People are busy with their tablets and phones on campus and you have an old phone that you are even scared to lose because you know getting a new one will be hard.”

Male Participant 3:

“The style of clothes people wear is so different, people wear anything, girls in shorts, weaves, nails and hand bags, it’s like going to the mall. You find guys walking around campus with expensive brand clothes and all sorts of cool gadgets. It’s like living the American lifestyle here”

Female participant 1:

“You did not have to wear weaves, back at home, it does not make sense to spend that much money on your hair. People live like celebrities on campus [Group laughter].”

Male Participant 3:

“Overall, campus is completely different from high school and home, here you are on your own and if you do not speak English, own a smart phone and a laptop, speak English with a fancy accent, you are out.”

4.2.3. Self-perceptions

This theme captures the participant’s opinions about where they came from, how they perceive themselves when they are away from university and before they were students. The challenge with this theme was inability of students to reflect on their overall lives without including their current lives as students. Most of the participants stated that in their communities, going to university is seen as a possible vehicle out of poverty. Under self-perceptions, two sub-themes were highlighted, these are, Potential and Gender differences, and these are elaborated below.

4.2.3.1. Potential

Participants discussed that before they became students, they did not lead expensive lifestyles and that their main focus was getting an education. The latter is seen as an opportunity to change the financial situation at home.

Male participant 4:

“In high school, few lucky learners came to school having had cereal for breakfast. No big deal but almost everyone ate amagwinya (fat cakes) for lunch, no one brought left over Spur ribs for lunch. This was normal.”

Male participant 7:

“So, as much as you know you are poor because you see all the things you do not have on TV, I always got excited and inspired that I will soon be a university student, the first to get a degree at home.”

Female Participant 2:

“At home, even now, I do not care so much about what I am wearing and what my hair looks like. I think because we wore uniform, in high school you did not have to think about, ooh! I wore that two days ago, and no one carried an HP Laptop in a guess handbag, a R1500 rand weave and a tablet to class.”

Male participant 7:

“All I did at home was play soccer, hang out namajitha (the boys) at the tuck shop, go see my chick and go to school and hopefully get accepted at university. Life was simple”

Female participant 9:

“The funny thing is that there would be one person in your community going to varsity and come holidays, they come back looking good and stylish and all that and every parent in your neighbourhood starts telling their kid, ‘you need to pass’. (Group laughs)

4.2.3.2. Gender Differences

The participants discussed the differences in how they are treated by their parents. Girls are treated more strictly than the boys hence, girls express feeling more freedom as students whereas male participants expressed that they already had freedom when they left home. This means that if a female student decides to change her behaviour and appearance, the changes are more visible to society

Female participant 1

“The first thing my parents said when I left was, ‘uziphathe kahle’ (behave yourself), they think university is parties, sex, failed exams and lies to milk money out of them.”

Male participant 10:

“At home I can’t smoke, I go out.... To my visit my friends, No! Not clubs (Group laughter), but can’t smoke like I do here. My parents would assume I learnt it here but I started smoking at high school.”

Female participant 5:

“When I am here on campus, I can wear pants but when I am at home, I do not, that is the law at home.”

Female participant 3

“You know at home when my boyfriend calls me, I am 22 but my parents act as if I have never met boys. So, you cannot just say ‘babe’ you must say hello first then walk out [laughs]. If my phone rings, I leave the room.”

Participants agreed that once they learnt to adjust on campus, they sometimes struggled to find a balance between their social life at home and the new life on campus.

Female participant 6:

“Yes, we won’t admit it, BUT guys, university changes us a bit and when you go home, your friends think you are the coconut. Your university life takes over so much, you run out of things to talk about with your family and friends and, you suddenly feel out of place in your own community. The tough part is coming back to campus and feeling out of place also. (Group agrees)”

4.2.4. Labelling: A social barrier

The third theme presents the dynamics of friendships and basic social interactions among students within the university. Friendships and other interactions were highly predetermined by access to certain places on campus, i.e. Cafeteria, going out to eat, or attending certain classes. Under this theme, four sub-themes have been identified: perceived privilege, friendships, fashion trends and finally, labelling.

4.2.4.1. Perceived privilege.

Participants stated that there are many social incidents on campus that cause them to constantly compare themselves to others who are perceived as privileged.

Male participant 5

“As soon as you walk in to the campus gate, you are reminded that you are poor, whereas, at home everyone looks almost the same you are not constantly comparing yourself.”

Male participant 10:

“We are unlike the student who comes from a rich home where the parents own a company. For us, this, getting our degree, is the only thing, the only hope for a better future.”

Female Participant 9:

“You feel excluded most of the time! You even think “whites rule and black people nje are out, we have nothing, ha ha ha ha. It’s sad really.”

During the discussions, most of the comments made were followed with laughter, however, participants expressed that the constant reminders of their disadvantaged lives caused some emotional strain.

4.2.4. 2. Friendships

Participants reported that the initial experiences at university made it hard to meet people during a time when everyone was not concerned with academic work (Orientation). They further expressed that the perceived privilege among other things played a huge role directly and indirectly on whom they became friends with. Money was also highlighted to have a perverse influence on where they spent free time on campus and that in turn, determined the people they were likely to meet and spent time with.

Female Participant 2:

“In High School, you moved with most of your primary school friends and you had five more years to learn everyone’s name and personality and make new friends. Here you come on your own, you do not know everyone because everything changes every semester, you move around because of accommodation and it’s scary a bit.”

The constant changes within university, e.g. end of the semester, doing different classes, changing accommodation and others were all stated as barriers in building lasting friendships. There was an agreement among all male participants that even though they would not mind to make friends from different backgrounds, inability to interact with certain people prevented them from meeting and interacting with certain groups on people within the university.

Male Participant 4:

“Yes, you cannot meet people at the ‘White Cafe’, you cannot buy the food there, it was not made for us, you cannot tell me you spend R45 on a meal in one day. So, I never even go there.

Female Participant 3:

“Even when you are not going to buy, just to hang out, you walk in there and they look at you and you feel you do not belong there, people stare at you for just passing by, and it’s strange.”

Male Participant 8

“Thing is, we did not grow up eating in restaurants, so the setting is unfamiliar and so you walk in there it becomes obvious that you are unfamiliar with the place and it becomes obvious that you do not belong.

..... Male participant 5: *“Birds of the same feather flock together.”* (Group laughter.)

Male Participant 4

We meet at Jubs because that is where we eat, amagwinya (Fat cakes). If we could afford KFC or Steers, we probably would meet other people but we only get to meet those we are around.

Female participants reported feeling more limited make to new friendships. The challenge to belong and to fit in was made harder by perceived privilege and disadvantaged.

Female Participant 2:

“As a girl, it is different for us, it is impossible to make friends with rich people, bayazitshela!”

Probe: What does that concept mean? Ukuzitshela?

Female Participant 1:

“They think they are superior, stuck up. They talk only to people on their level. An example. A girl in a weave and fake nails, or Indian or white girl, walks in to a lecture venue and you are all sitting there, they will skip and walk all the way to go ask someone looks like them, they do not know each other but they always pick each other in a crowd, either in colour or with weaves and nails and smart phones, do they assume you know nothing because you are not rich?”

4.2.4.3. Fashion trends

Participants also expressed that there was a huge following of fashion trends within the student population and that their inability to afford certain clothes, among other things, prevented them desired social interaction.

Male Participant 5:

“I do not mind associating with people who attend bashes and clubs but then you always have to think, how am going to afford, I am broke”

Female participant 6:

“I do not participate in any campus activities like sports and stuff, you cannot participate because you have to pay, and even if you had money to come to these games, everyone is wearing these new trendy sneakers.”

Probe: (Please share with us which sneakers you are referring to?)

Whole group-response: “Nike trainers!”

Female Participant 7

“2015 trend.” (Group Laughter)and they are expensive, R500 - R700, I cannot afford that, if you do not have those, you are out!” (Group laughter).

Female Participant 6:

“So, instead of being around people who make you feel poor and out of fashion, you want to look good and fit in but you cannot compromise so I just avoid any activities in the first place.”

Trying to keep up with fashion trends by girls was considered as loss of Identity by majority of female participants.

Male Participant 6:

“When they go home you find that they take off the lace wig and they have an afro.”

To an extent, following clothing fashion trends was not seen as an issue however, hairstyles, wearing makeup and the use of English language were considered a possible move away from ‘your true self’.

Female Participant 4:

“If you become friends with Indians, you end up being wanting to look like them and you become a coconut.”

Male Participant 5:

“If you are friends with Indians, you end up putting on weird hair pieces and dressing up funny, you get lost, your Zulu identity disappears.”

Female Participant 5

“I feel like changing the way you look so much, changes part of who you are, part of your Identity.”

Participants expressed that the way students dressed and groomed themselves was somehow a statement about their identity. Furthermore, the ability or inability to afford popular and trendy clothes on campus

meant one could not part of the popular student group. Even though participants expressed a certain level of judgement towards those who followed fashion trends, there were subtle suggestions that they, themselves would follow these ‘fashion trends if they could afford it.

Male Participant 10:

“Most students dress in the same style, same shops like... MR PRICE!”

Female Participant 9

“Mr. Price, it’s a very cheap shop and it has every trendy clothes, and the price is low. They consider students; they must now allow us to open accounts.” (Group laughter).

4.2.4.4. Labelling

Some participants stated that, everyone knew how to identify with the social labels used on campus however, in their discussions, the labels that were mentioned seemed be directed towards other Black South African students and grouping all the other racial groups together under White students. Labelling was done with consideration to one’s assumed status group, one’s use of the English language, One’s fashion choice and social engagements within the university.

The ‘White cafe’, ‘O-Glama’ and ‘O-Cheese boys’ (Glamorous).

Male Participant 9:

“I can sit in most spots on campus but not at the White café, (chuckles)...not for any particular reason but I just have never felt the need to go and sit there.”

Female participant 3:

“Well for me it’s, O-Glama [glamorous girls] no-Cheese boys (Males that come from rich homes) that sit by the cafeteria.” [Laughs]

Probe: *“What is the ‘White Cafe’*

Female Participant 1:

“(Laughter...whole group joins) ... “The ‘White Cafe’ is \that area by the Mel-lHerbe library, the setting is very white, even the blacks there only speak English and they look like they like they belong there. “

Male Participant 5:

“The ‘White café’ has a glamorous vibe.”

Probe: *“What is O-Glamour?”*

Female Participant 5

“Black girls on campus, you find them with lace weaves wanting to be like the Indians and whites.”

Female Participant 4:

“You find them even talking in English maybe you are purely Zulu but people cannot be sure any more because you now have lace wigs, foundation but your hands look black.”

Participants expressed they did not belong to the same group as the students who followed western trends on campus.

4.2.5. Social Support

The last that was identified is the issue of social support. This theme sums up the support that the participants believe they have and the role it plays in how they adjust to university lifestyle. Participants expressed that they had little faith in the services provided by the university, either from experience or hearsay. Most of them stated that they decided against consulting with the university Student Counselling Centre for professional support. A few of the participants stated that they had spoken to mentors about their challenges, even fewer had consulted with SRC members for administrative issues. Most of the participants reported that they felt that both services did not assist them in coping with academic and emotional challenges. This theme constitutes of two sub-themes, social/emotional support and academic performance.

4.2.5.1 Social/ Emotional Support

Participants felt they had little faith in the student’s services on campus.

Male Participant 5

“You know; all these things we have discussed have taught me to be independent. SRC, Mentors, Student counselling and all of them, cannot really help you.”

Female participant 2:

“When I am at home, I am introverted and quiet, at res, it’s fun, there is technology, it is more developed here in Durban and eish at home, you have to fetch water from far, and there is no electricity. Durban, you get water here, you can charge your phone here, res is fun. [Group laughter]

The participants that stay at university residence noted that they felt more at comfortable at residence compared to when they were on campus and for some, in their actual homes. They felt they had a stronger support system at University residence from fellow residence mates.

Male Participant 6:

“It is crazy hey! Here at res, I found people like me, we help each other and most of us are from the same backgrounds, we understand not fitting in at home because people think you are better and not fitting in here because so many people are better than you.”

Male participant 5:

“Here at res, people are loud and we get along, we talk, at home, my friends treat me differently but the only thing we have in common is soccer. They look at you and they think you are happy, you are getting an education and I tell them you don’t know how hard it is.”

4.2.5.2. Academic adjustment.

Some of the participants reported that while they were working hard to achieve academically, they struggled to cope with their academic challenges and to achieve academic excellence. They expressed that the main aim was to pass and move to the next level even if they were average performers. The latter led to the following sub-theme: social support. Participants expressed that academic challenges brought them together as students and that they had no other choice but to finish their chosen degrees.

The Participants discussed that they felt pressure of expectation from home to complete their studies hence, instead of focusing on what is going on socially, they spend most of their time trying to deal with their academics. The latter was seen as means of fulfilling a role that was more important to them than fitting in on campus.

Female Participant 1:

“My siblings depend on me, they are my responsibility and I have to give them a better life so that they do not feel the same exclusion on campus, I focus on that goal other than myself to keep me going.”

Male Participant 2:

“At the end of the day, academic stuff is the same, we all get a question paper at the end and that is what really matters, yes, it is hard to blend in with the crowd but my family’s is investing in me, so I know one day I will have things but for now, I must get that degree.”

Female participant 7

“I go to the library thinking I’ll study then I sleep all the time from there I go to ‘res’ and cry sometimes, but then we push each other with my roommate, she gets it, Iya-chawana i-course (Course is hard).”

Male Participant 6

I heard if you get more than 75% in all your modules, you get a Cum-laude, which means you are on the university top ten and so far, I am on top 500, (Group laughter).

Female 2

“Yes, most black people never get great marks, but ke, we will graduate on record time. You cannot compete with people with Psychologists and Lawyers and Lecturers for parents, my mom does not even know what course I am doing.” [Group laughter].

Even though participants expressed that academic performance was not good and that they were challenged by the courses, they noted that it was still the main focus of their experience in university.

Male Participant 3:

“Environment here on campus is training us for the big world, it is even worse out there, the gap, compared to in here, truth is we are unequal and different so this whole thing teaches me that I need to adapt and get along with people from different walks of life.”

4.3. Discussion

Literature points out that, almost all of the universities in South Africa are built within urban areas with the exception of a few that are in urban townships i.e. Mangosuthu University of Technology and the University of Zululand; Dlangezwa Campus. This is the main reason why students from disadvantaged communities move away from home to attain higher education (Asmal & James-Daedralus, 2001; Kagee, Naidoo, & Mahatey, 1997). The first move away from home for first time students suffer reduced personal contact and support from family and friends (Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007). Without the support of family and friends, in an unfamiliar environment, new students are more likely to feel insecure and anxious about what to expect (Bojuwone, 2002). The meaning that new students attach to the first experiences at university shapes their initial opinion of university life (Bojuwone, 2002). The above arguments highlighted challenges that participants related to, they discussed issues around anxiety about relocating to campus and feelings of disorientation when they were unable to navigate their own way on campus. The major discussion about these feeling centred on orientation period and the incidents that took place during this period. The orientation period is the initial steps to introducing the students to the university infrastructure, internal proceedings and structures

The following is a discussion of the first theme, orientation. This themes captures the first encounter experiences of the participants as they went through the process of getting enrolled at Howard College Campus. The theme was further divided in two subthemes, locating campus and incompetence.

4.3.1. Orientation

A review of the data collected suggests that, the initial encounter with the university provided for the participants, an orientation to the structural setting, rules, and expectations and to social atmosphere of the campus. These encounters later shape their overall perceptions and attitude about being students. This supports the arguments in literature that, first time experiences in a new environment, away from familiar support systems cause insecurity and anxiety for new university students (Bojuwone, 2002; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007).

In trying to understand the factors that had an influence on the events that occurred during the orientation phase, for this particular group of student's, economic background was highlighted. Majority of the participants stated that they had to come for registration without the company of family members nor friends and some had to miss some of the scheduled orientation programs due to lack of funds. All of the participants reported that they felt to an extent, a level of anxiety and frustration in the first few days at

the university. This anxiety and frustration, was reinforced when the participants struggled to navigate their way around campus without the support they were used to at home and high school. The participants further reported that heightened anxiety and frustration evoked feelings of incompetence and loneliness.

The second and third factors that the participants felt influenced their experiences were lack of course information, specifically, the modules they were supposed to register for, and lack of basic computer skills. Previous research has indicated that gross inequality and lack of resource provision at school level leaves students from disadvantaged backgrounds under-prepared for the demands of tertiary leading to the anxiety and feelings of alienation (Kagee, Naidoo, & Mahatey, 1997). In the discussions with the 19 participants, it was mentioned that by the time classes started, they already felt disorientated. This disorientation was marked by anxiety, frustration and feelings of being under prepared for university. These feelings whether changed over time or not, appear to have a major role in shaping the held meanings and narratives about the first experiences for these students.

4.3.2. Culture Shock.

Read, Archer & Leathwood (2003) argue that, in the first few days of university, new students engage in the process of negotiating with the unwritten rules of university life. This gives them a chance to observe and assume their role as members of an institution. It appears that the levels of anxiety that are experienced during orientation are short lived for some students. They successfully find ways to cope with the pressure and learn to find other means of getting assistance within campus and begin to understand the rules and expectations that are used to function in the absence of family and friends to support them. The latter was found to be untrue for some participants. Students discussed the presence of anxiety even after the orientation period. These feelings influenced how they handled the encounters they had in the social environment at Howard College Campus.

Culture shock was caused by two major factors, the use of the English language and western trends that other students followed on campus. In a new environment, the strength of one's social identity is determined by the ability to establish a sense of belonging (fitting in) and a perception that one will be able to deal with challenges that arise, this in turn, aids a healthy emotional and social adjustment (Brown, 2000; Howard, 2000; Pescarella & Terenzini, 1991; Sennett, et, al. 2003; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Some of the participants in this study expressed that they were shocked by the level of culture differences marked by the use of the English language and fashion trends. This phenomenon is argued to be one of the factors that cause poorer social adjustment for new university students (Sennett, et, al. 2003).

Participants reported feeling different from majority of the crowd but more specifically from the Black, Zulu students who choose to communicate in English, those that follow trends by having the latest hair styles, clothing and digital gadgets. The shock elevated when the environment was viewed in comparison to their previous one, i.e. home and schools. Little things, such as greeting someone, addressing lecturers by first names, girls in short skirts and weaves, were some of the unfamiliar practices mentioned by some participants. Some of the female participants reported that not being able to communicate comfortably and fluently in English and not being able to keep up in appearance while on campus, made them feel different and excluded from the wider social circles on campus.

The social identity theory proposes that individuals in a new environment mentally start to create categories of “them and us”; this is used to understand their own place in society (Mach, 1993; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Some participants stated that the culture shock wears off after a while as they start to interact with the people who follow these trends and practices. The culture shock was a common experience for the participants and once experienced, it brought a shift in how students perceive themselves as compared to before.

4.3.3. Self-perceptions

There was a clear challenge in getting the participants to reflect on their overall lives without a comparison to current lives as students. Self-perceptions have an influence on the held beliefs and the choice that students make on campus about their social lives. The social pressure and the ability to handle social pressures of university life were determined by two major factors; potential and gender differences. For some participants, life prior to university was kept inexpensive and participants reported that majority of the youth in the communities they come from are focused on the opportunities that are to come after high school. Participants stated that, going to university was and is still perceived by themselves, the teachers and parents as a potential route to access financial freedom. Participants discussed that while they were at home, they felt no need to compare themselves with fellow community members. Perhaps the lack of comparison was because the economic gap within rural households is not as big compared to when the participants started in the urban community of Howard College Campus and Durban city. This supports an argument that, poor people are in constant fear of being embarrassed or excluded in the presence of outgroup members because their lack of material things and is more visible when compared to those who have material things (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002). Participants reported feeling more confident in their communities as compared to when on campus.

In reflecting on social roles while they were at home, the participants expressed that parents back at home impose strict rules on girls as compared to boys with regards to, dating, going out and what they wore. Some of the girls mentioned that they feel more freedom on campus than they do while at home. Life at home was described by some participants as simple whereas universities are described as a place marked by a high adherence to Western trends.

Participants expressed that they had a choice about whether they must follow these trends or not, their choice was limited by the inability to afford. Lockhat (1997) argued that, under the growing adherence of Western ideologies, South African youth are being alienated from their social realities. Participants were in agreement that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who start to follow fashion trends and use of the language as their primary language of communication in social interactions while at university may encounter social challenges when they go home. Participants discussed that students who manage to establish a place on campus social trends, struggle to maintain their social roles when they are at home and vice versa.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that, in each environment, individuals want to feel a sense of belonging and failure to maintain this sense of belonging brings low self-esteem on the individual's identity status. The focus group discussions indicated that participants wanted to belong and fit in within the university however, could not afford to keep up with the trends and lifestyles of university students. Contrary to that, some participants expressed that they did not feel any emotional strain for not being able to afford the lifestyle of an average Howard college trendy student. This is particularly the case for the participants who either felt that they could not compromise finances for other necessities in order to afford a lavish lifestyle and the ones who had decided they can wait until they finish their degrees, get their own jobs and buy their own things, thus they prioritize their studies more than social life.

4.3.4. Labelling as a social barrier.

Another key assumption of the social identity theory is that people are intrinsically motivated to achieve a positive distinctiveness and that they strive for a positive sense of self (Serap, et al., 2015). To achieve this positive sense of self, people use their social reality as point of comparison because it provides basis for self-definition (Serap, et al., 2015; Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Brown, 2000; Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Howard, 2000; Mach, 1993; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Using these markers, language; fashion trends; and the ability to afford a lavish lifestyle, participants establish which

categories they belonged to. By labelling the self and other students based on above mentioned markers of difference, participants were able to construct an identity within the university.

Participants considered and referred to themselves, rural disadvantaged students. In the process of categorization, people use them/us in order to establish and validate their social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Once participants establish who they are on campus, there seemed to be an easy coming tendency to label other students. Black students that either spend their time with white students and follow fashion trends, were labelled as, 'o- Glama' for females and 'o-Cheese' boys for the males, space on campus was also used as a marker of difference, the cafeteria with a more expensive menu on campus was referred to as the 'White cafe'.

Friendships and other interactions were highly predetermined by access to certain places on campus, i.e. cafeterias, using the taxi or bus versus ownership of a vehicle, eating at the shops in gate 3 (Steers/Nandos) versus buying at Jubilee shop. Participants spoke of themselves as rural disadvantaged students and the students who do not fit in that category were assumed to be privileged/ rich kids. Participants stated that there are many situations on campus that cause them to constantly compare themselves to others who are perceived as privileged. According to the discussions, participants felt that, the difference in lifestyles is likely to determine how friendships are formed on campus. Some participants expressed that, the economic difference, the constant changes within university, e.g. end of the semester, enrolling in different classes; changing accommodation etc., all had a bigger role to play as barriers in building lasting friendships.

In identity construction, categories can only exist in contrast with an out-group, which is when a person sees themselves and other people as counterparts of society. i.e. (rich versus the poor); (South African versus American). Once this process occurs (categorization), the individual begins to respond to the other person as a member of a group than as individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Participants chose to use the phrase 'we', black disadvantaged students in comparison to 'them', rich kids, coconuts, whites. Individuals chose to identify with a group whereby they could gain social competence or self-esteem (Campbell, 1997). Participants expressed that they did not feel as though they were part of the group of privileged students and this meant that they saw themselves as the out-group members of the campus community.

The participants of this study highlighted that they felt more comfortable eating in places or sitting in places where they could afford to pay. Furthermore, they chose not to participate in activities or be in

places where they felt they could not afford. Once differences were established, participants reported that they use names and labels to refer to other students.

Bias towards in-group members creates stigmatization of out-group members, depersonalizing people based on labels and stereotypes (Lurge, Zosuls & Rubble, 2008). During this process (depersonalizing), people ceased to see the self as just an individual but as a member of a larger group. Participants reported that, outside of class, they interact with other students based on their given labels. Hence, not 'hanging out at the white cafe', not greeting the 'coconut and o-Glama and assuming that everyone who goes to the 'white cafe is rich', assuming that o-Glama do not care as much about their studies, amongst other things.

Literature suggests that once the stereotyping and stigmatization occurs, there is a possibility for negative or lack of social interaction between groups (Bangeni & Kapp, 2005; Brown, 2000; Howard, 2000; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The latter appears to be the case at Howard College Campus. Labelling was used by students on other students openly. During the discussions, some participants stated that, everyone knew how to identify with the social labels used on campus. The labelling is directed more towards Black students perceived as having privilege. There appeared to be a casual acceptance during the discussions that Black students were economically inferior to Indians, Coloureds and White students. Furthermore, there was a level of tension and judgement generated towards Black South African students who appeared to be rich, preferred English and spent more time with whites and international students than other groups. Labels seemed to stem from a presumption that all white students are from rich homes and there was a tendency to group Indians and Whites in the same category when discussing race.

4.3.5. Social Support

Participants emphasised that, not being able to afford, to follow social trends within campus meant that they could not be popular on campus. They however, emphasised that being able to relate to other students who were in similar financial standings allowed them to build and strengthen their own social circles. This appears to bring more meaning in their social lives as university students. Higher levels of perceived social support and self-esteem are positively related to positive adjustment, and are important factors in the process of academic, social and emotional adjustment (Friedlander, et al. 2007; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000).

The participants in this study expressed that they have little faith in the services provided by the university and that they interact very little with the other groups of students. They further highlighted that there is an expectation from home to finish with their studies in record time and fulfil the role of being the provider. The students highlighted that this puts a certain amount of pressure on them. There was consensus among the students that even though there was little social interaction on campus the university residence provided a home away from their own home. They felt that they had a stronger support system at university residence. Students reported that when on campus, they constantly felt the need to compare themselves and felt incapable of fitting in socially, they however felt a sense of belonging in residences. The social support system created at residence is maintained by the reinforced sense of belonging that students feel by being part of a group that consists of people they can relate to socially.

4.3.6. Social Identity construction.

Social spaces on campus, in this case, the residences and campus space, both provide the platform for unwritten rules of interaction. It is within this space that students define their identities and form social support structures of their own. Tajfel (1978) argued that when negativity stems from one's social identity, the individual attempts to improve his/her situation through identity management strategies and these were discussed in the theoretical framework section. The following will be an attempt to illustrate how the participants for this study used Identity management strategies to improve their experiences within the university.

Individual mobility strategy involves either behaviourally or psychologically leaving the group. This is done so that the individual minimizes the negative feelings experienced due to their social identity (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). Participants discussed feelings of anxiety, frustration, loneliness, disorientation and shock as initial emotional states when they first arrived on campus. Overall experiences, background and observation of the university trends and popular culture led to a general tendency for participants to consider themselves not just as students but as, Black, rural, poor undergraduate students. This internalized label was not only in comparison to 'white privileged students' but also to 'black, urban, privileged, students'. The participants that took part in the discussions did not attempt to change themselves by trying to fit in with the trendy crowd. In fact, they seem to have embraced their identity and continue to use it to secure a support system that assists them to deal with the academic pressures on campus.

Social creativity involves a re-evaluation of comparison context; they do not change their identity but work towards establishing a positive sense of self within the already existing social space (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). The participants seem to have adopted the latter strategy. By emphasizing the importance of focusing on education while on campus, by not engaging socially in spaces and in activities they believe only cater for privileged students, the participants were able to find meaningful reasons to embrace their economic backgrounds and believe in future success. They prided themselves with the idea that they will work their way out of poverty and be able to give back to their communities.

During the discussions, participants referred to changing your appearance, eating expensive food or partaking in trendy and popular activities, using English as a primary language of communication outside of lecture theatres as ‘trying to be something you are not’ and losing your identity. When they label other students, and exclude themselves from the social activities on campus, the participants find a way to avoid the emotional strain of not fitting in when around those they label as privileged.

Collective strategy involves direct competition with out-group in order to reverse group status. This may be done through social behaviour, the lower status group members become active in establishing a position in society and do so collectively (Diener & Biswas-Dineier, 2002; Rojas, 2008). The participants seem to have created their own group, it provides social support. While the participants expressed that they would be happy if they were able to pay for and afford a lavish life, follow trends and own expensive things, they chose to embrace their current economic status. Participants were hopeful in the change that education would provide and that while they are at university; there is no pressure to try and fit in. Some of the participants further concluded that while they are to an extent changed, influenced by the university social environment, they cannot afford to completely follow western trends and become urbanized as that would exclude them from the social environments back at home.

4.4. Conclusion

The chapter has presented and discussed the results as captured from the data collection process. Thematic analysis was used as a method of analysis and following the six steps of analysis, the researcher identified and defined five themes and these are: Orientation, Culture Shock, Self-Perceptions, Labelling: A Social Barrier and Social Support. The themes were presented with quotes of extracts from the transcribed data. A discussion of the themes also facilitated a link between the data and theoretical background.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

The primary objective of the study was to examine the experiences of undergraduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, focusing on the dynamics of social identity in the process of adjusting to university. This chapter is a discussion of the main conclusions from the findings drawn from the data proceeding from the focus group discussions; it further discusses the limitations and recommendations of this study.

5.1. Conclusion of the study

The three main objectives of the study were; exploring the experiences of economically disadvantaged students in adjusting to university life, in addition to that, the study aimed to explore the shifting social roles and social pressures that under-graduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds experience at university and finally to explore the impact of university as a social setting on social identity of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The findings revealed a number of interesting factors, some of which might be better explained with more research and a broader focus in the social identity of these participants before they became university students. The following section is a presentation of final comments about the results.

5.1.1. Socio- Economic background

Socio-economic background operates as a foundation for social and academic adjustment at university. The first year on campus marks a period of adjustment and a shift in social roles. Inability to bring an extra person for moral support during registration and lack of computer literacy, by the time the students start university are major challenges affecting how students cope with the pressures of university life. Not only are students from disadvantaged backgrounds underprepared for general academic life, they are also under more pressure to finish on record time. The cost of living in contemporary society demands that these students choose between being active members in a trendsetting society or be excluded from it just so they can remain rooted in their less expensive lifestyle and focus only on their academics. The research data indicated that inability to engage in some social spaces within campus is a result of social barriers such as language, social status, race and social spaces on campus. Perceived differences between groups of students further perpetuate lack of social interaction between students on campus. Social status mainly, a disadvantaged background negatively impacts on the confidence and social engagement of students on campus. The latter presents major emotional and social strains for the students in their undergraduate years.

5.1.2. Culture differences and adjustment

Participants found the social culture within the university different from the social culture at home and the schools they come from. University culture was marked by an urban lifestyle which the participants felt they could not afford. Instead of trying to fit in and trying to fit into roles that allow them to be part of the crowd within university, the participants resort to forming their own support system at residences where a number of residents come from a similar background. They find ways to embrace their social backgrounds and are using it as a motivation to commit to academic life. This study however was not

able to document and discuss how students that are not able to maintain a good academic performance are socially adjusted in to university.

The possibility of changing to fit in is perceived by the participants as losing one's identity. Thus, to create a sense of belonging, they resort avoiding and even resisting any engagement in social activities on campus, some even go as far as avoiding social interactions that might compromise their lifestyle on campus. The economic gap between rural and urban communities suggested in literature indicates that the general economic gap in the country is not just within racial groups rather, it is within social classes (Aliber, 2003; Nastras & Seeking, 2007; Woolard & Klasen, 2005). It constraints social interaction within groups of students and that continues to create a gap for labelling and stigmatization to occur between students.

Adjustment to the chosen participants is viewed as being able to cope with the social pressure to fit in by not succumbing to lack access to an urban lifestyle that is popular within the Howard College Campus. Economically disadvantage students find social support from fellow students which in turn helps them to feel a sense of belonging with the university, that in turn helps them to focus with the academic pressures rather than social adjustment emotional adjustment.

The findings of this study shed a light in to the social identity of disadvantaged students and their experiences in adjusting to university. Exploring their experiences brings focus to the rather very small but vital part of their experiences as students. The methods used to collect and analyse data aimed to present the information given by the participants and theory in the best possible way.

5.2. Limitations of the study

During focus group discussions, majority of the participants expressed that even though they are aware of the emotional strains that come with being economically disadvantaged on campus they have adjusted well in to the university community by creating their own circles with other students who have similar backgrounds. The data presented their experiences as authentic as it possible however, there are a few limitations that can be identified from the literature backgrounds, in the process of gathering data for this study and the results, and these include:

5.2.1. Literature background

The literature back ground for this study provided a better understanding of the context study and the theoretical framework in which this study was understood however, there was very little research on the topic and within a South African context. Therefore, the research sources for this study are older and more American based. There appears to be a gap in literature on the topic, especially recent and local study.

5.2.2. Representation

The number of students that participated in this study was not representative of the diverse student population at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. There is no guarantee for equal demographic representation in the University. Due to the number of participants, the study is not suitable for generalisation. It is a useful tool to use this study as a base for understanding the challenges facing new students from economically disadvantaged background.

5.2.3. Academic performance.

The results of the study highlighted that economically disadvantaged students should prioritise academic success in order to gain a sense of self-esteem within the university. Contrary to that, Summer (2013) highlights that there is poor academic performance within the economically disadvantaged group of university students. This research was not able to provide comprehensive data to support this finding.

5.2.4. Support Services.

The focus group discussion has brought up awareness to issues and challenges that some of the participants had not received a chance to reflect on. The data was collected towards the end of the 4th semester. There was limited time and space for the participants to cover all the topics they felt emerged from the focus group discussion. Though the researcher took necessary steps to ensure that support structures were provided for the participants post discussions, participants were soon going on vacation thus to debriefing and support were not available for participants that might have needed it during the vacation period.

5.3. Recommendations

Participants discussed the difference it made to come to campus prior to the registration period to get used to the university settings but also expressed that lack of finance, accommodation prevented them from early preparation. A recommendation in this regard is that, the university needs to invest more on planning, time and funds towards making the orientation period conducive for all students irrespective of their background.

The university has a further obligation to balance out the provision of guidance and mentoring for new students who come to register, especially for those who come without the company and support of family and friends. Provision of such resources would make the first experience of new student less anxiety provoking, less overwhelming and more reassuring.

One of the major problems highlighted in this paper (study) was under preparedness of student for university life and lack of skills to cope with university demands, both socially and academically, i.e. computer usage, English as a mean of communication. In this area, the researcher recommends that an outreach programme is provided for high school learners as a strategy to ensure that they have exposure and basic skills to compete at university while they are still in their high school years. This can be provided by relevant and willing candidates in partnership with the schools through mentorship, guidance and field trip programs that expose learners to the university prior application period.

A further recommendation, is that research done on the topic of social identity in the process of adjusting to university social life, needs to incorporate the aspect of academic adjustment, to explain in depth the belief of a ‘better future through education.’ that was expressed by majority of the participants. Participant expressed that there is a hope amongst disadvantaged communities that with an education, one gets access to a better socio-economic life and is able to help their family financially. This assumption was used by most participants as a reason to commit to university and ignore the emotional strain of social exclusion. Further research could explore the implications of that general belief and its impact on the overall quality of the participants’ experience at university.

Participants expressed in ability to engage in social spaces on campus due to inability to afford the services offered in those spaces, i.e. Food, a recommendation would be for the university to evaluate the affordability and variety of food services within campus in order to cater for all students and create a space where social engagement is not hindered by financial need. Further research might be an attempt to engage participants from a higher level of their academic years in order to explore whether the proposed themes change over time to explore the factor that influence their experiences as post graduate

students and if they are any different from the ones that were discussed in this paper.

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APPENDIX 1

The interview schedule.

The focus group duration : 1 – 2 HOURS.

Proposed time: 12h55 pm– 13h00 pm.

Venue : The Multimedia building: room C1

Interviewer : Thobile Bridget Ncane

Equipment needed : Voice recorder, Note book & Pen, Name tags, Demographic information forms.

Refreshments : Water, biscuits and juice.

Procedure

- Welcoming and introductions
- Orientation to the interview process: The aim of the study

The duration of the focus group

Rules and conditions during the period of the focus group

Questions for clarification

Interview questions

Ice breaker: How was your weekend?

Questions.

1. Tell me about your experiences when you first became a student at the university?
***Probe:** do you remember specific events that occurred.*
2. Do you experience any differences in the social life you have at home than when you are on campus?
3. What social activities do you do on campus?
4. Which people are you comfortable being friends with on campus?
5. What places on campus do you spend your time when not attending classes?
6. Do you feel an expectation to be different on campus than what you are at home?
***Probe:** If yes, in what way are you expected to be different?*
7. Do you think that the move from home to University has had an emotional impact on you?
***Probe:** If yes please explain?*
8. Have you experienced any changes about yourself since enrolling as a student?

Conclusions, Closing: Thanks

APPENDIX 2a

Informed Consent Letter

School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Howard College Campus,
University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Dear Participant

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

My name is Thobile Bridget Ncane. I am a student, currently doing my Master's degree in counselling Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am conducting research with the aim of exploring the experiences of university students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds as they adjust to social life at university. This research will assist in understanding the experiences of the students and the impact these experiences might have on their wellbeing. I hereby request your participation in this study. You are a potential participant because you are an undergraduate student from a rural area and an economically disadvantaged background. You understand and can tell better than anyone your experience which will make a valuable contribution in this study.

If agreed, you will be part of a focus group.

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
 - The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.
 - Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
 - Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
 - You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
 - Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
 - If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		
Video equipment		

For further information, I can be contacted at: Thobile B. Ncane, Cell Number: 0787638017, Email Address: mathoandridge@gmail.com. My Research Supervisor: Miss Ntombi Mtwentula, Tel: 031-

2601087, Email: mtwentulan@ukzn.ac.za. You may also contact the Research Office through: P. Mohun
HSSREC Research Office,
Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

APPENDIX 2b

Confidentiality agreement and Declaration letter.

DECLARATION

I..... (Full names of participant) hereby
confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I
consent to participating in the research project. The discussions will be recorded. I understand that I am
not being forced to take part in the data collection process and willingly agree to be part of the study

-

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX 3

Focus group confidentiality agreement

I, (Full name of participant), hereby agree to keep all information gathered within this focus group confidential. I will not disclose any information gathered from this focus group, that is not my own, outside of this allocated time and place.

.....
SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

.....
DATE

APPENDIX 4

Gatekeeper Permission Letter



School of Psychology

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, DURBAN 4041, SOUTH AFRICA. TEL: +27 (0)31 266 2527 FAX: +27 (0)31 266 2618.

The Dean and Head of School
Applied Human Sciences
Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban
4001

01 April 2015

Dear Professor Mkhize

Request for permission to sample research participants within the School of Applied Human Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Howard College Campus.

It is with knowledge that the Dean/Head of School of Applied Science gives permission to the researcher to conduct research within the school. I hereby request permission to select 1 to 20 undergraduate students from School of Applied Human Sciences at Howard College Campus. The students will be requested to participate in a qualitative research regarding social identity as they adjust to university. The purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of undergraduate students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus.


The participants will be interviewed in focus group discussions. Confidentiality will be assured through provision of consent forms which students will be requested to sign as agreement prior to participating in the focus group discussions. Participation in this study will be strictly voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time. The researcher will ensure that the time selected for the focus groups does not clash with the student's academic schedule. The focus group discussions audio taped and the data will be safely secured in the School of Psychology.

The Dean Permission to Sample Students from the School of Applied Human Sciences

The data accumulated from the research will serve as fulfillment for the Masters Degree in Counseling Psychology.

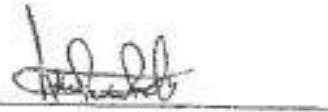
Should you agree to grant me permission to access undergraduate students from School of Applied Human Sciences at Howard College Campus, please may you sign below as an indication of your permission to access this sample.

Yours sincerely



Ms T.B. Noone

Researcher
Email: mathoandridge@gmail.com
Contact No.: 0787638017



Ms N.A. Mtwentula

Research Supervisor
Email: mtwentula@ukzn.ac.za
Contact No. 031-2801087



Professor Mkhize

Dean and Head
School of Applied Human Sciences
Email: Mkhize@ukzn.ac.za

18.04.2015

Date

APPENDIX 5

The Registrar: Permission to Sample Students from School of Applied Human Sciences



5 August 2015

Miss Thobile Ncane
School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Howard College Campus
UKZN
Email: mathoandridge@gmail.com

Dear Miss Ncane

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Social identity in adjusting to University life: Experiences of economically disadvantaged students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal".

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by approaching and conducting focus group discussions with undergraduate students from the Howard College Campus who must be from a disadvantaged economic background.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book.

Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

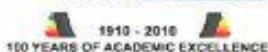

PROFESSOR D JAGANYI
REGISTRAR (ACTING)

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Providing Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

APPENDIX 6

Research Ethics Committee: Approval Letter



14 October 2015

Miss Thobile Bridget Ncane 207500878
School of Applied Human Sciences
Howard College Campus

Dear Miss Ncane

Protocol reference number: HSS/0906/015M

Project title: Social Identity in adjusting to University life: Experiences of economically disadvantaged students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 13 July 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Miss Ntombekhaya Mtwentula
cc. Academic Leader: Dr J Steyn
cc. School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4609 Email: ximber@ukzn.ac.za / snymann@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

APPENDIX 7

Turn it in Report

8/31/2016

Turnitin

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Originality Report

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By Thobile Ncane

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UNIVERSITY LIFE: EXPERIENCES OF ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED
STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL. By Thobile B. Ncane
207500878 Dissertation submitted

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **30**
Master of Counselling Psychology School of Applied Human
Sciences (Psychology) College of Humanities Supervisor:

Miss Ntombekhaya Mtwentu, a 2016 Declaration I, Thobile Bridget Ncane,
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declare that: (i) The research reported in this **2**
dissertation/thesis, except where otherwise indicated is
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in the dissertation/thesis and in the References sections.
Signed..... I Acknowledgements I would
like to acknowledge the support of the following

people who assisted me to finish this research. I thank God **93**
for

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